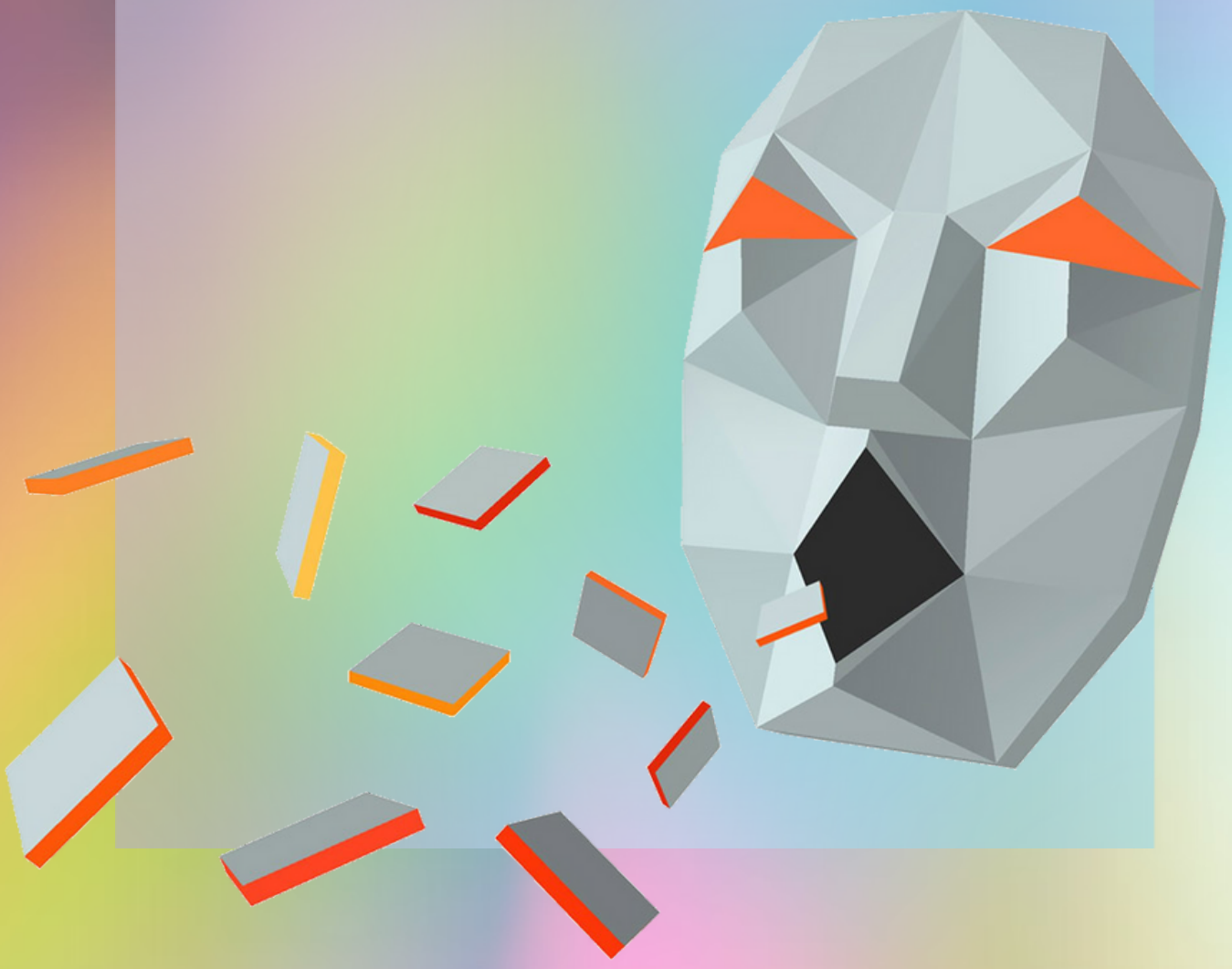
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MAY 22
012

LUXURY PERIODICAL

TOO LITTLE TOO LATE EDITION




by Anonymous
king
rook
pawn
bishop
queen
knight

NOTE: THIS MAGAZINE IS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN. ALL MATERIALS USED IN THIS MAGAZINE ARE OWNED BY THIS MAGAZINE. IF UNLICENSED OR IMPROPERLY ATTRIBUTED MATERIAL IS FOUND TO BE PUBLISHED IN THIS MAGAZINE, EMAIL US. &&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&





Weeaboo Jones
to me



IGNE NATURA RENOVATUR INTEGRA



ARAMAIC PSYTRANCE CONFERENCES_FEATURES_MODEL_ MINIATURES_

-°+

YOU ARE HERE

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2022

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2C. No Audience Needed



When I was a boy, my father took me to see plays performed in our local theater at regular intervals. He was a great lover of art, and though we were not rich then, my father always told me that the difference between a rich man and a poor man had naught to do with something as insignificant as money. I loved spending time with my father at the theater, and I would keep the tickets to the plays we say in a small box underneath my bed. The tickets were my trophies that were more important than the play they represented. Once I lost my ticket on the walk home due to a large gust wind pickpocketing me unawares, and I remember feeling that it was such a waste to spend the evening at the theater being unable to keep my ticket. I had only seen the play if I had some sort of proof, and without the ticket, how could I say I had even seen the play?

One afternoon my father came home with two tickets in his hand. He told me that the show being performed at the theater that weekend was an extremely special one. He told me that we had tickets to see the greatest actor the world had never seen.

"You mean the greatest actor the world has ever seen," I corrected my father.

"No my son, the world has never seen him, and if we are lucky, it never will."

I didn't quite understand, but my father's queer smile told me that I would never get any more out of him, so I shrugged my shoulders and went on with my carefree childhood. On Friday night when it was almost time to see the play, I asked my father why he wasn't yet dressed.

"What did I tell you son, the world has never seen this man perform, what makes you think you could see him? Tonight we enjoy the fact that a play is being performed for us; it isn't necessary for us to go see it, hmm? Here, here, take your ticket, and you can put it with your others."

I took my ticket from my father and went back to my bedroom. I pulled the box of tickets out from under the bed and set that night's ticket on top. I looked down into the box of tickets for a moment before pulling the ticket back out and ran to the theater. I was not surprised to find a line of theatergoers waiting to be allowed in. As I got closer however, the row happening at the front door became evident.

"Is it not enough to know that he is performing a great play?" the well-dressed man asked the crowd, "You are all patronizing his art and should be proud of that fact. How selfish you all must be to demand to see this art with your own eyes, as if you are more important than anyone else."

I glided through the grumbling crowd and made my way toward the door while a loud patron argued back, but the mustachioed orator stopped me with a hand to my chest and winked down at me.

"Look at this ticket in your hand," he spoke to me alone, "That ticket is a physical manifestation of an ideal. You have allowed a great artist to create art and bring it into the world. Because of your generosity, the world is more beautiful than it was before. Is that knowledge not enough to satisfy you?"

I walked home that evening very confused. While I pondered what the man had said, I considered how I prized the tickets to the plays I had seen. I had never considered the audience to be a part of the play in any way, but I could not wrap my head around a play that had no one to see it be performed. I had the ticket to prove that the play really happened. Was that really all that mattered? My father laughed his hearty laugh when I told him where I had been and he promised me that I would understand one day.

The next week the tickets to the play were being sold for outrageous prices to those that had neglected to purchase them in advance of the performance. A child at my school told the class that he had seen the play, but he didn't think it was that great. The other children believed him. I saw the same man red in the face arguing to be let in to see the play later bragging to his neighbor that he isn't so selfish as to need to see the play for himself, yes of course he bought a ticket, and he stayed home that night to silently patronize the arts. He had the ticket with him that he proudly showed off very modestly.



This memory was a forgotten one until after my purchase of lot 02-G. A very prolific painter of my time, Mr. ––––, with whom you are no doubt very familiar, had passed away, and at the sale of his estate his final testament had stipulated something very peculiar. Lot 02-G was a safe inside of which was locked a painting that had never been seen by the eyes of another than those of its painter.

"The reserve price is quite high," the auctioneer warned, "And if this price is not met, the highest bidder will have to pay the sum in full, and the safe will be opened and the painting will be donated in their name to the local art museum for any to see. Naturally, I am not at liberty to disclose the reserve price to you all."

This statement produced an uneasiness in the crowd. We were all familiar with ––––'s work of course, as we were in the second day of bidding on his masterpieces and personal possessions. I myself had already amassed a considerable amount of his artwork, but this lot gripped the very core of my being. I thought of the shoebox of theater tickets that I had as a child and I realized that this painting hidden behind steel was the pearl of great price, and that I could be the only man to ever witness the greatest actor the world had never seen. I knew I had to win this lot, and after winning the bidding war, just before the auctioneer closed the lot, I doubled my own bid for the crippling fear of not being above the reserve price. I could not stay to view the rest of the lots.

At the conclusion of the auction I was given the safe containing the hidden artwork as well as a sealed envelope containing the only written combination. "This letter was written and sealed by his own hand," I was assured, "There isn't another soul alive who knows the combination, and the safe is extremely secure; it will never be cracked."

I brought the monstrous safe home with me and sat down in my chair by the mantle. I held the envelope up to the light of the fire for a moment as I thought back to my father's smile when he brought home the tickets to the play we never saw together. The fire warmed my bones and I flipped the envelope over. I lingered for a moment and suddenly understood perfectly. As I smiled, thinking of my father, I threw the envelope into the fireplace.



Anonymous 03/01/22(Tue)11:42:55 No.885260 ▶

>>885203
Take your meds



STEAL THESE STORIES!

An evolutionary tale about a cell suspended in media who, in the beginning, mostly postulates about the emergence of consciousness but after a while he encounters some other molecules and divides himself and collects and stores proteins and sugars and eventually develops like an organism with increasing degrees of complexity and scale all the while picking and choosing specific traits and mutations and testing different evolutionary timelines of himself by stretching and peering through the fourth dimension all before finally solving himself on some fringe satellite orbiting Mars as some antisemitic tardigrade.

A mexican cartel members goes fuckin loco when some CIA gringos steal his sweet seniorita amante and rough her up in a Cuban blacksite. He beheads his way from the outskirts of Sinaloa to Guantanamo Bay where he rescues his lovely hermosa novia and they conceive a young cholo atop a mountain of decapitated heads.

Grave of the Fireflies except the older brother guy is an escaped Ted Kaczynski, his little sister is your typical /lit/ frequenter, and instead of WWII-torn Japan it's post-nuclear North Carolina, preferably told in first-person by either. Both of them die at the end from radiation poisoning to re-emerge as ghosts witnessing the dawn of the 4th industrial revolution.

Gnostic fanfic part one of a trilogy about Archangel Michael being delivered by the Demiurge to kill Elon Musk on behalf of a shady unknown agent. Michael has to do battle with some archons sent by random Aeons and there are epic war scenes where they absolutely devastate Israel. The Divine Christ conjures and dispatches a supreme warrior that possesses and inhabits the body of Dwayne Johnson. Archangle Michael and The Rock face off and The Rock ultimately defeats him somewhere near Cairo. Michael reveals that he was hired by Sophia (who now sides with Yaldabaoth) to prevent mankind's colonization of space.



A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

What the fuck man? This is what happens. This is what happens when you rely on a dude like me to get shit done. You don't even know who I am yet do you? I've tried to tell you. I've tried! Nothing is easy man. I've failed at more things than most people have even considered to try. I am not special. You could have done this. You could have just fucking pulled your pants up and baked some threads and opened canva and thrown together a bunch of persiflage and voila dude. Voila. That's it. Is it that easy? Well? You tell me. Oh wait, that's right, you're just you and I'm me. I'm the fucking king of this steaming outhouse for no other reason than that you just apparently couldn't be. I even asked nicely. I said: "Please anon, go for it!" I'm sure I did. Check warosu. I probably did. Warosu barely works anymore. Whatever man I said it. I don't have a great memory but it's pretty accurate.

This magazine was made for the readers because good writers do it for the readers. Remember that? You like that? &amp Magazine remembers. I'll make a deal with you fuckers. It's the same deal we always had: If and when I feel like crawling back to /lit/ and being cool and creative (which only seems to happen when I'm going through some real shit), I'll grace your dissociative asses with some real combat media, some real edgy, flashy shit. You see this issue's cover? Meh. It's not that great. You could've done better but nahh you're better off doing that thing. You look good by the way. It's okay, you know? I'm not actually mad. We could do a lot worse. I'm pretty sure that I started the magazine because I was inspired but now it's fundamentally become a tool I must use to pad my portfolio as I try to play the game and get money. Get it, boys. Or don't.

If I sound bitter it's because I'm in character. The real me is some caricature of myself, some alternative version of the honest me that my ego has crafted just so that I can overcome *it all* and get there. You understand.

Heh. Chya. Cool man. Cool cool cool. So like. What's going on anyway? Anything happening? I heard you were going to write something and then you sent it to me and I guess I lost it so—yeah. That's on me hey. Send it again, for sure I'll keep my eye on the inbox. Yeah man. I'll totally be in the gmail just waiting for your thing. Stoked.

Actually now that I'm here I should definitely bestow at least some proper acknowledgment of your achievements. Your *props*. Well done. You really kicked ass. Check out the last page for your special thanks. Lol.

Not all of you can be an F. Gardner, or an Ogden Nesmer, or a Prussia, who totally shit the bed last Christmas by the way. What the fuck Prush. I thought I could count on you to do like seventy hours of free creative labor, sourcing chan archives, digging through backlinks past ancient imageboards and pastebins and lost media, doting on countless spam emails just to find a distinguished few gems barely worth publication in this sterling indie zine. What happened man? Too busy fending for yourself? Too busy daytrading and leveling up? Busy counting your ETH? Didn't you see all the threads I baked up in /biz/ and /g/? I looked up to you man. Your ass used to be beautiful. Guess I'll see you in Chem. Or math. Are you taking math in September? I got Wilson for math so for sure I'll see you there. Wilson hates us, it's going to be fun lol.

Cal man. Dude you're only one of these fucks that I'm about. You can do no wrong man. Did you fucks know that the anon who wrote The Justice System is the same dude who put together the Moby Dick project? I bet you thought it maybe wasn't. Well it was. It was him. You, I mean you. Sorry. It was (You). I mean it bro nobody gets me like you do. What the fuck. Bro I need you to text me back man, I'm genuinely sorry for gaslighting you and stealing your Jeep. You're like a brother to me man. You're like a weird perverted brother that wouldn't take no, you know? That's us man. This is our year man. One last big heist.

There's a handful of you guys that have consistently served to fill these pages and have contributed some seriously quality stuff. I would like to take a real moment to acknowledge you all. Like I should have mentioned earlier, maybe you'll see your name in the credits, maybe not. Also I'm not really a super great leader or anything. If I was I would definitely make sure to isolate each and every one of you and personally hand you a bright red envelope with a shiny gold star and a fresh crisp hundo that you would receive with both hands. That none of us get paid to do this is likely one of the main reasons that I don't take it too seriously anymore. Which isn't exactly fair but I don't care. Guys like Ano and Ari and Carter and Jonas and Kit and Chris and Placento, and man there are a bunch more of you now that I'm actually trying. That's pretty amazing. Maybe that is what I'm most proud of at &amp, marshalling these epic resources, and hopefully inspiring any of you to write. We are &amp.

Imagine us all bustling around some office floor, handing in manuscripts and pulling together designs, slipping on deadlines and fucking around. Maybe in another time. Maybe. When I zoom out what I see is a great group of interesting and talented artists, each of us with our own unique flair, each of us coming from our own angle, throwing something down, putting another tile in the mosaic, turning the kaleidoscope. If I didn't have to work, I would do this fulltime. It's my favorite creative outlet. I could write and edit and shitpost and go crazy and turn inside out and then do it all over again. That would be meaningful. It's nice to imagine that if we were to keep going, then maybe in any number of years we'll have amassed something worth noting. Maybe if we hang on long enough, we can actually attain significance. Maybe. The only way to achieve anything is to keep going. I *have* learned that. There's a lot of good that can come from wasting so much time and effort. And I believe in great things to come, if not for this project, then for something like it, something adjacent, something related.

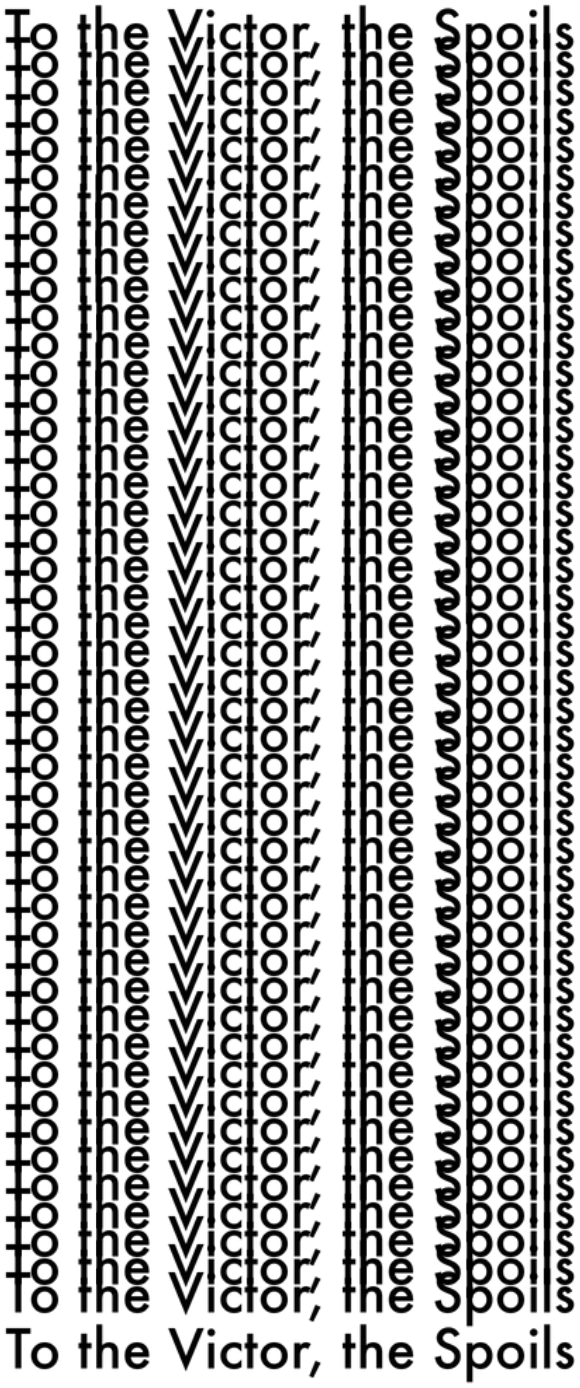
I remember the weekend that &amp Magazine was founded. That was plenty fun. I remember the idea developing so rapidly in my mind that I stayed up for almost four days straight, dipping in and out of consciousness, I remember how it felt when I discovered Canva.com. Man I love to shill for Canva. I would work for them. I should apply. It really is idiot proof. They would probably love to advertise a full length magazine created entirely with their platform. They probably could too if we weren't so edgy. Oh well. Like I said, after a few years of stacking issues we'll be in a better position to make claims about legacy and demand respect from the universe. There's a strangeness to addressing &amp's contributors publicly, almost intimately, while at the same time fostering the goal of growing up and becoming more. Perhaps that's just my ambition. Most of my dreams involve scale, though I can't promise the same on behalf of anybody else. I also happen to be a master of managing expectations, and it is true that I would be happy to simply do this, writing and editing on the smalltime, forever.

This beast shall burden on. I'm a fan of finding utility in &amp Magazine, because as Neato™ as it is, it'd be a lot cooler if it had benefits beyond those which we've already made.. Again, I put this shit on my resume. And I'm always spamming myself to firms and publishers and agencies of all kinds in New York and LA and the bigtime around the world. It's just another detail in the list of things that are supposed to make me look like a creative overachiever. And it's easy, it just takes time. The idea was to automate the production process by creating a hierarchy of responsibility, something that would see the magazine publish itself, from my perspective anyway. Alas af. I'll keep trying. I'll keep encouraging you all to take the reigns and accept the torch. One of my most satisfying experiences at &amp was when other anons created entire issues on their own, and I could submit something, or not. I loved that. That made me feel like I'd done something. That made me proud. Make me proud guys. Thanks.



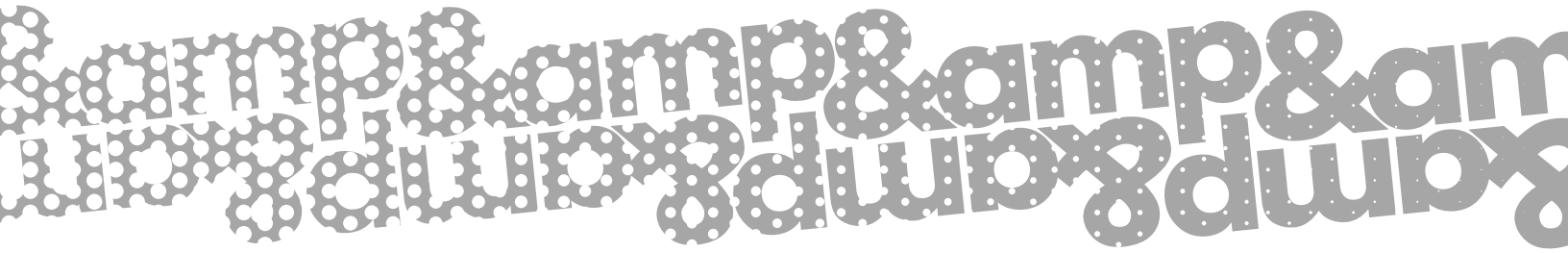
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Robert Merrimack

“It is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism “ -Fredric Jameson



Criminal Executioner Overlord Nefarious Norgath grasped his battle scepter and entered the Market Arena. Clad in brightly colored armor festooned with the skulls of past mergers and proudly bearing the shiny logo of his corpo-tribe, Overlord Norgath cut an imposing figure indeed. To his right screamed and cheered his corpo-thralls. At the far end of the arena another supercharged, burly man-beast made an entrance, clutching an electrified trident in one hand and a vicious blade in the other. In equal and opposite reaction, the thralls of his corpo-tribe cheered for their champion. Through armor and helmet, the two contestants sneered at each other menacingly , snorting like bulls, steam spouting from the vents in their face plates in sharp bursts as their powerful lungs greedily sucked in air.

“Silence! Quiet you all!” Bellowed an immensely obese man who sat atop a lavish, bejeweled tower overlooking the rabid masses.

“I, Overseer Morbidius Flattus Maximus, come to you today to preside over and officiate the sacred corpo-rite of merger and acquisition by combat!” At this guttural announcement the gathered horde once more went overboard in their love for violence and profit, stomping their feet and chanting deafening cries in brutal ecstasy. In the higher bleachers of the stadium, the mutants and cursed ones of the menial classes could no longer contain their bloodlust and in in their excitement began fighting each other, ripping and clawing and sending the occasional limb flying until finally the pit guards patrolling the stands beat them back into submission. In the lower stands, nearer to the action, the middle management thralls, clad in respectable business robes, clapped and placed bets. And lastly in the VIP turrets surrounded by armed guards, machine-gun nests, barbed wire, and flood lights, the patrician C-suite Overlords smiled thinly and whispered discreetly among themselves, sure of their plots. Their investments long ago tied down and secured.

“Yes, make no mistake,” Overseer Maximus continued. “The longstanding feud between Fallmart Inc. and Crosshair Ltd. is to be settled once and for all this auspicious day, in a glorious gladiatorial fight to the death! And to the survivor goes the legal right of all the forfeited assets, obligations, and contracts herewith detailed…” Overeseer Maximus proceeded to read a long list of legal stipulations from a scroll, the holdovers of the sacred code of the lost times of the Corporate Golden Age before the Great Crash. Above, the menials nodded off and fidgeted and grew restless and the pit guards, watching them intently from the aisles, gripped their stun clubs in anticipation of any trouble.

“Now, without tarrying a moment further,” Overseer Maximus went on, his voice booming in a more theatrical tone and his hands gesticulating with a rhetorical flourish. “Ladies and gentle-mutants, slaves, menials, and part-time employees; overlords and captains of industry, by the powers vested in me by the all-knowing, all-wise Invisible Hand, may the Market decide your fates! Begin!”

At this word the two titanic warriors lurched forward and met in a brutal clash of muscle and steel. Executioner Overlord Norgath swung his battle scepter with immense force, while his opponent Krull, effortlessly bobbing between the cruel mace-swings, stabbed with his shock-trident and slashed with his cost-cutter blade. Norgath, despite his hulking size, gracefully dodged these swift attacks. Until at last Krull’s relentless onslaught paid off and he scored a glancing hit with his cost-cutter and slit Norgath’s bicep.

With first blood spilt, an uproar issued from the crowd. Boosted by combat stims and with his faith in the Invisible Hand and its divine Profit Motive steadied, Norgath felt no pain and showed no reaction. His bloodshot, pitiless eyes remained fixed on his quarry.

Krull cackled mean-spiritedly, his wicked laughter tinny and muted behind the thick steel trap of his armored face plate. “Fallmart will be mine, weakling! The Market demands it! The Invisible Hand wills it!”

Norgath scoffed wordlessly. This fool will be crushed ‘neath his mace in short order. No use talking to a dead man. Krull thrusted with his trident but Norgath sidestepped it and, with a sweeping upward diagonal swing of his weapon knocked it aside. The shock trident went spinning many yards through the air until it found its way plunged into the chest of an unfortunate middle manager seated in the forth row, who soon burst into flames from the excessive voltage. Those in the crowd variously gasped, laughed, and cheered.

Looking down from upon his luxurious perch above, Overseer Maximus gloated over the carnage. He feasted upon wasteland boar and gulped down potent rad-booze as he savored the barbarous spectacle.

With now only his trusty cost-cutter, Krull tossed it between his hands playfully as if ready to fake out his foe with his guiltless wiles. Then without warning he unleashed a frenzied storm of slashes, putting everything he had into it to overwhelm his hated nemesis and spray his blood over the sand so that he may deliver value to his shareholders. Norgath moved back with uncanny, juiced up agility, bypassing each wild cut, until finally the fiend attacking him became exhausted and gave him an opening. In one momentous low sweep he smashed in Krull's leg at the knee. Screaming in pain the fearsome tyrant fell down on his good leg. The massive trunk of his broken leg now lay limp and shattered on the ground. Despite being maimed, Krull kept viciously waving his cost-cutter in defiance, rage-filled and indomitable to the last. Norgath extended his battle scepter out with one hand with dramatic flair and wheeled around and surveyed the audience.

"What does the market demand?" he thundered, his shout loud enough to overwhelm the collective noise of the entire stadium.

"Death! Death! Death!" shrieked and pleaded the eager spectators.

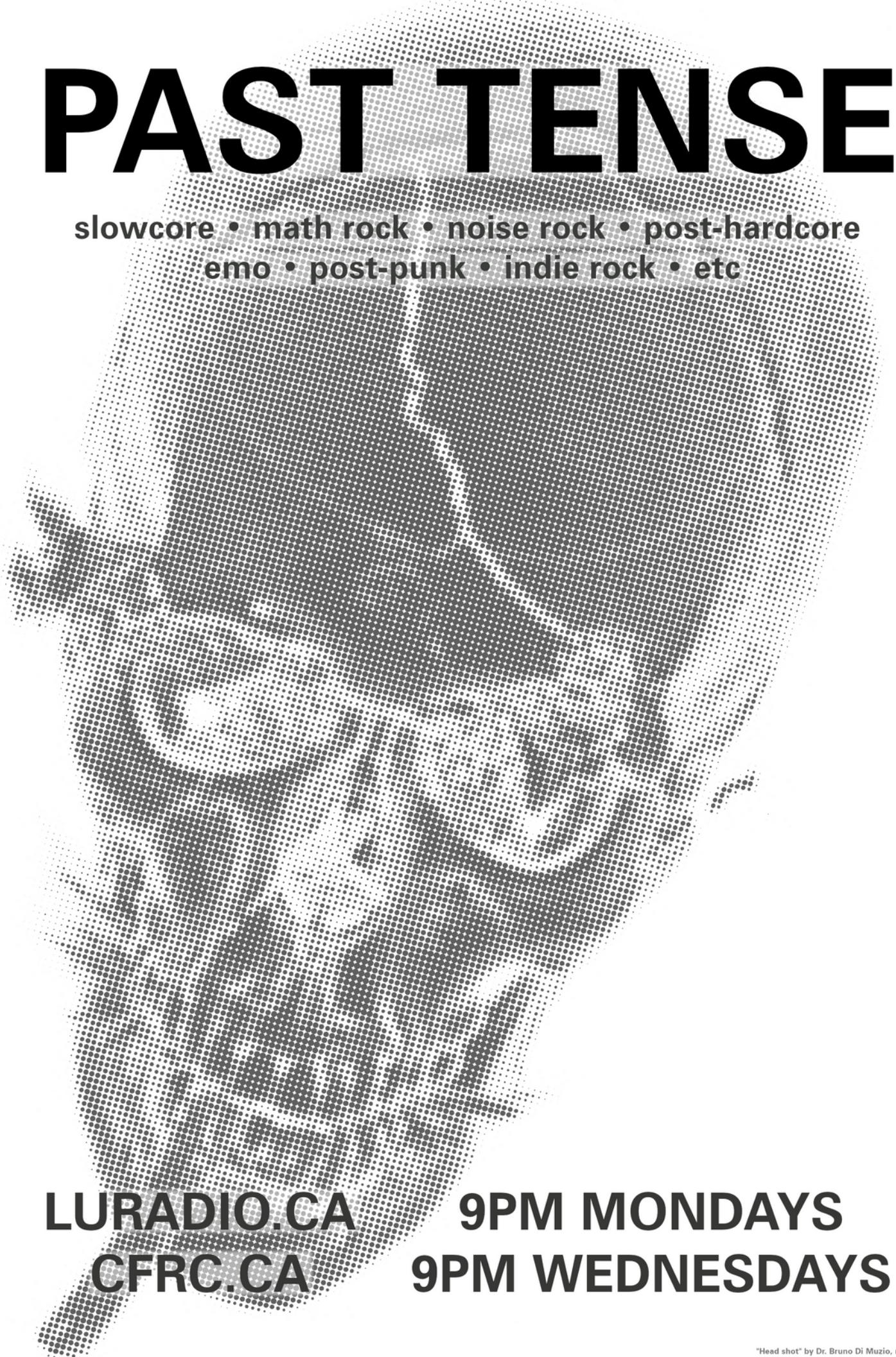
At last, to toy with and torment his competitor, Norgath aimed his mace at his opponent's head and wound it up back and forth slowly, as if he were preparing to hit a home run off a batting tee. His advisory, now thoroughly exhausted, resigned himself to his fate by spitting on the ground. Then, in one bone-crunching, catapulting strike, the champion landed a rib-shattering blow directly on Krull's chest, launching him back several feet where he landed with a dull thud in a crumpled, vanquished heap. Victorious, Norgath raised his battle scepter in triumph as the arena exploded.

As shown on the screens above the stands, Fallmart Inc's stock price shot up in magnificent winning green while Crosshair ltd's stock bled out in defeated red.



PAST TENSE

slowcore • math rock • noise rock • post-hardcore
emo • post-punk • indie rock • etc



LURADIO.CA 9PM MONDAYS
CFRC.CA 9PM WEDNESDAYS

"Head shot" by Dr. Bruno Di Muzio, modified (CC BY-NC-SA)






enlocon
DINE

spit in my soup.

It's been a few minutes since we were served, but it only took me an instant to see it: spit in my soup. My date, so far unaware, is enjoying the start of her meal while I'm stuck trying to figure out why I'm in this situation--why I'm sitting across from this near-stranger while someone waits for me to swallow up their ugly little glob of sputum. So I sit here--like an idiot--perplexed and just faintly upset. Part of me wonders whether I did something to the waitress, and another part of me starts forming the words that I'll have to say to this girl who's gaily eating across from me.

I try to replay every moment up until now: walking in, being seated, speaking to the waitress, waiting here in awkward pre-dinner communion, then being served. In it all I fail to see the moment when I suddenly set things off. It might just be the way I look, or something about my demeanour. So now I pick apart every little bit of my exterior: the clothes I'm wearing, the way I'm sitting, my manner of speaking, how I walk. Though I continue to reach dead-ends on why I'd be singled out, I arrive at one conclusion: I deserve this. Not that I want it, no, but that something about me exudes weakness, that I let someone think they could do this to me. So I start to feel differently, but still I just want out.

Finally my date clues in. Half-jokingly, she asks

"Is there something wrong with your soup?"

"Yeah..."

and I hush my voice,

"...I think someone spit in it."

It comes out almost pleading, as if I'm begging her to tell me what to do. Immediately her brow crinkles, while her mouth twists into a little grimace around an urgent

"What?"

And that's when the waitress comes back.



"How is everything so far?"

When I turn to look at her I search for something in her face that'll tell me whether she's in on this. That searching turns into a confused hesitance while my date waits for me to act and I wait for the waitress to crack. And it still feels like I deserve this, like I'm waiting on this woman to tell me what sin I've committed. Then my silent beseeching is interrupted: a little sibilance cuts through the formal murmur of the restaurant, like a hose sputtering steam. For a second I think the waitress has started to hiss at me, but then I see past her. On the other side of the room is a door to the kitchen, which for a moment is broken open by a waiter shuffling plates. Through the doorway I catch a glimpse at a line cook whose eyes are fixed on me as he stifles giggles behind an ugly, mocking sneer.

At that I feel a pang shoot through me. The obvious first words,

"There's spit in my soup."

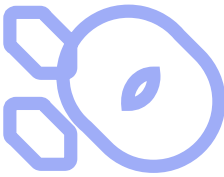
come out with accidental, haughty indignance, which transforms my confusion into typical impotence as I stand up in a rush and make the standard declaration that I won't be paying for this. My date is taking a back seat to it all, and she might as well; I'm the one making a scene, and she's stuck going along with it because there's no recourse from these sorts of things. The waitress gives me an

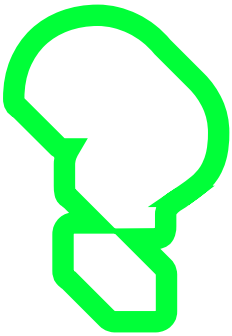
"Excuse me, sir?"

with a shocked, unbelieving air--taken aback as if I'd just uttered a threat. But then she makes a quick study of the soup and the all-too-obvious slime shifts her tone to supplicating. I look to my date:

"I'm leaving. We're leaving."

and while she hurriedly, awkwardly grabs her jacket, I can't help but glower at the kitchen door. ["The"; "Her" is not the door]Her little hand at my back urges me towards the exit and I feel myself bristle at the assertion. But I avert my gaze and do my part, nearly leaving my date behind as I stride away from the situation. My teeth are grit. I see myself suddenly becoming the stereotypical "offended wimp" who huffs and leaves. In retrospect, I can see it on myself from the moment I came in. I see what the cook saw, and I get why he thought he could do this. I see the universal contempt that I made myself a vessel for--made by being so terribly weak.





While I make my escape the sound behind me changes. It's not the subdued chuckling from before, but a whole swell of laughter that overtakes the restive din. It shocks me and I give a start, stopping in place. For a moment I believe it's the entire restaurant erupting at me, but really it's just one voice, just the line cook. A flush of heat runs over my back and through my chest up to my face. I feel a little tingling premonition in my shoulders. My right leg won't stop shaking. It's at the door that I turn back.

I'm standing in place when I bellow out. A short, echoless

"Fuck you!"

that dies on the wooden walls. It fills up the whole room like a black cloud, out of which eyes suddenly stare, transfixed on the scene between me and the cook. Whoever wasn't already clued in starts to whisper about what the hell is going on, but nobody really knows. Even I don't get it, nor do I see where it's headed. The waitress makes a move to get away, pulling her little notepad up to her chest like a rosary. From my sides a manager with a stern face and the biggest waiter seem to be closing in on me--ready to sweep me out of the door--as if I'd be cowed so easily. Ahead of me is the rising, wailing laughter still spewing from the apron'd hyena who's now standing in the doorway of the kitchen. His whole chest heaves in rapturous gasping as he directs all the air in the room down onto my head. No one knows what to do about him. Then there's me. From somewhere beyond me I hear a low and serious

"Sir."

but they don't catch me as I close the distance to the kitchen.

There the cook is still in his giddy hysterics, propped up on the jamb of the door while he clutches at his chest and howls from under his involuntary squint. I'm just an arm's-length away and closing the gap with an angle from elbow to knuckle up into his jaw that sends his opposite temple into the edge of the frame. And then he's below me, no longer doubled over but crumpled up. He's now limp, and I see a little trickle of red coming from his temple. Rage gives way to reason while I stand over him. Everything condenses as I hear the shrieking or shouting all around and I feel various hands grip my shoulders and I'm no longer in control and I wonder:

Why did he spit in my soup?



Sickly luminescence fries the eyes of a twelve-year-old boy sat supine, retinae needled in on an LED screen. His brain matchsticks pale eyelids open, dopamine receptors frothing and foaming. On the screen a crying woman entrussed in neon pink string is mechanically, manically skull-fucked, the back of her head pressed down onto an anonymous navel by a glistening, Herculean arm at the roots of her hair - an anonymous penis is rammed down her oesophagus until she vomits, penis still in mouth, crying and heaving in paralysed sobs. The twelve year old emptily climaxes, cuts the power on the phone and contentedly slides into blissful postejaculatory sleep. His neck will ache for a post-waking, fast-breaking hour. Her gums will bleed for three days. She will vomit blood and pus for a fortnight, and her throat will bruise for a month.



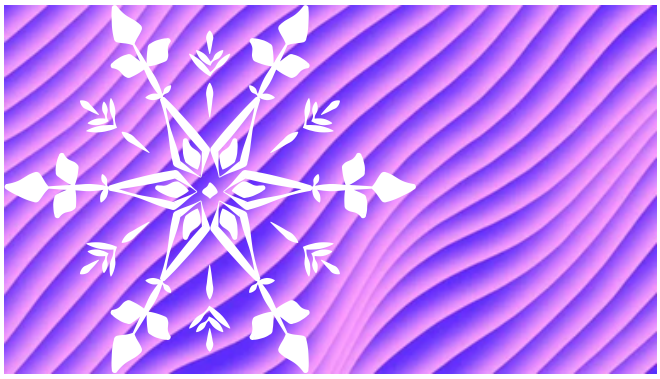
The notorious intubation process practiced at eating disorder treatment facilities: a desperate woman writhes and is held down by unidentifiable labcoated men; a long, clear tube being forced violently up through her nose, shoved down her nasal passage down to her stomach, into which a thick, white, calorically dense liquid is pumped. She groans and sobs.




>>47001875
maybe step one to making it is leaving this godforsaken site


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Warszawa Wileńska,



December 25th

by KEVIN GLAUBER FERRETO

Once upon a time on a dark and foggy Christmas night, I found myself in Warszawa Wileńska Station waiting for the late night train. The digital clock on the panel marked 2:45 in the morning, at exactly 3 A.M. my ride to Malkinia would be docked to leave and, as it is to expect of such Catholic holiday, I was the sole soul in the entire building. Anyhow, who else would take the 3 o'clock train on a Christmas night? You know how it is in Christmastide, most people probably found themselves at home sleeping with their stuffed bellies, perhaps some of their children tried to stay up until late, waiting for the Mikołaj to drop a wrapped package of toys under the decorated tree, but at this late hour, even the most resilient child was already on its deepest slumber. Well, even those who had no family or no one to resource to would be now quiet at their homes, Christmas is also famous for lonely people who'd stay up till late staring at the television, pretending they don't exist just to not show off their loneliness. What a shame it is to be known as a person that goes alone through the entire Christmas night… I'm sure the apartments of Warsaw were full of such people, especially on the lifeless communist-era blocks nearing Warszawa Wilenska, I can picture alcoholics stocking a couple of wódka bottles to endure the holiday, or maybe elderly bachelor ladies petting their cats and wondering if they have done the right choices in life.

In a way I sympathise with this kin, the loneliest specimens of the human kind, now that I am past my reckless years I can see myself as being somewhat like them. Although the reason I was waiting for the train tonight is due to having a Mama and a Tata waiting for me at home, there is no denial that I am also having a lonely Christmas this year. The nativity of Baby Jesus was never the same once I moved to the big city. Things are rather dull once you finish your college and spend your earnings renting a cramped apartment in a not-so-privileged side of the town. I just had to stick to the first not-so-decent job opportunity and work myself to oblivion, come hell or high water the mailman would keep 'em bills coming. And who can I complain to? Capitalism doesn't care about the birthdate of a Messiah, one has to make the money for a living. So a couple of nights ago my boss just came to me and said "Listen here, Girl. You'll do the Christmas shift, and you will be paid extra." He just said that, not asking if I could make it, the bastard simply gave me an order. So that was me, working up to midnight in a coffee shop, preparing gingerbread spiced lattes for other lonely people who sat through the evening pretending to read books, that type of people that made me wonder who they are and why are they like this.

Now I realised, perhaps Eleanor Rigby was the best Beatles song for the season. The only suitable song. Where do lonely people come from and why do they have to be like this? Now that I happen to be one of them, I wonder how I got myself into this.

Year after year, Warsaw was not christmassy at all, no snow came down this night, only the grayish sky tinted of coal plants and car engines, that merciless colorless tone that led so many to depression and suicide. Rather than a white Christmas, the landscape was decorated by piles of dirty snow from two days ago resting by the sidewalk gutter, those cramped packs of snow that were often filled with cigarettes on top just like a cherry placed on an ice cone. That, in my opinion, was the clear-cut poiesis of modern Poland.

I had fifteen long minutes to go so I went for a box of cigarettes in my pocket and, although a sign said "Zakaz Palenia", I lit it up. Ah yes, that's my Christmas dinner, the suckable smoke of tobacco.

"God" said I as my voice echoed through the empty gallery of the station. "Why does such holidays always have to be a pain in the ass?" I inhaled the smoke deep in my lungs and let it down through my nose. Feels great smoking when you are told not to.

Lost in my thoughts feeling the wormwood taste of tobacco down my throat, I was interrupted by a sudden noise from a guitar chord that interrupted silence. I looked back for the source of this sound, and there was a man sitting on a bench, he wasn't there before as much as I didn't notice him coming in. He appeared to be around the age of thirty, reckless higiene as it is expected from a hobo. Long hair, shoulder length, long beard, poorly trimmed. He wore a thick jacket showing a flannel shirt underneath and had a dog by his side, one those lousy looking mongrels with dirty fur, the kind of pet you often see walking side to side with vagabonds. He had a guitar that looked quite rusty and out of tune, without minding me staring at him, he looked for another chord on the fingerboard and played a tritone, once again the noise disturbed the dead silence of the night. Finally he stared at me and said:

"What was that song? That one you were thinking about?"

"Are you talking to me?" I asked.

"Well, who else?" The man replied. "The song you thought about, the one about lonely people. What was the name again?"

"Eleanor Rigby?" I replied "But how do you…"

He paid no mind to me, playing C / C / Em / Em and singing twice the opening lines of the song "Ah, look at all the lonely people…" And once more C / C / Em / Em continuing the lyrics "Eleanor Rigby. Picks up the rice on a church where the wedding has been. Living in a dream…"

He suddenly stopped vocalising it and seemed to be giving a thought as he looked at the instrument, he turned back to me and said "It is a good song, is it not? I was never very fond of Lennon tho, he was too messianic for my taste."

"I guess it is an okay kind of song." I replied. "The Beatles are no longer my cup of tea, but I listen to them here and there."

"I can understand that. You've grown out of it and perhaps it is a sign of maturity… So, what brings you to the station?"

"To catch a train, of course. What about you, Pan?" I answered.

"I came here to closely watch the trains." He replied. "What have you been up to this Christmas?"

I started to wonder for a moment. Why was I talking to this man again? Is it loneliness forcing me to interact with strangers?

"I was working in a coffee shop through the night. Now I am trying to go home for Christmas morning with my family." I replied.

"She was working in a coffee shop." He repeated. "Now she is trying to go home for her family…" He put his guitar on his side. Connecting each finger tip of each hand, turning his eyes back to me and continuing his inquiry: "And I suppose you think it is overwhelming? Spending Christmas like that?"

"Well, I suppose… Who wants to spend Christmas working? Do you want to spend Christmas with a dog watching trains?"

"I suppose it is better than staying in a church. And I always have to stay in churches. There is always a Mass being celebrated somewhere. You see, even on Jesus' birthday the priests prepare a sacrifice on the host, and as always they make SURE that it is a sacrifice. I mean, it's the guy's birthday and you are sacrificing him again? Can't you give a guy one small day off?"

"I guess you're right. Catholics are all about Christ's sacrifice. But isn't it what religion is overall about in the end?" I said.

"You seem to get part of it, however, even tho Christ did everything for mankind, do Christians purposefully forget that they were commanded to do things too? Yeah, it is Christ's sacrifice that matters, but what about THEIR part of it? Will humans simply wash their dirty self with a Sacrifice without taking responsibilities? What about love? Verily I say to you, little girl…" And he cleared his throat as if he was to read some document. "'For I desire mercy, not sacrifice. And knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings', does it ring a bell? Do you know who said that?"

"No… I do not know what you are talking about…"

"Hosea. The Prophet Hosea said that. One of those books that Christians often forget to read. And in a way this is what I mean, that's what I miss about Christmas, that's what I miss about Christianity. Not delegating things to God, but doing as they were commanded. Love, here and now. Love as action. Lovingkindness so no one is left behind. Mercy, think of these words and your life will be much better, try to actually search the meaning of it in the dictionary."

I gave it a thought. Maybe he had a point. I was not really religious as it is to expect from most people my age, but he had a point. My country is renowned for its Christian morality, so where is the actual performance of this morality?

"I guess you're right. It's better acting than talking" I said. And started to remind me of a certain philosophy undergraduate guy I used to date, he wasn't that great in bed but made interesting conversation. In his opinion, morality is talking about what is right but never actually doing it. Ethics would be doing the right thing, but never talking about it.

"Yeah, your previous boyfriend is right." The man said as if he could read my thoughts. I felt no power of commenting on it, I simply let him speak. "Doing it, that's how it should be. Acting on it. And never getting anything in return, simply doing as God has done for mankind."

As he said these words, a train slowly approached and halted by the platform.

"You see. Be a good girl and pick your act of mercy. Maybe that's why you are not happy in life. And please… Do not be angry with God, do not say this date is a "pain in the ass" as you did. That's the least I ask you for today… Now go, the conductor is tired and he also wants to return to his wife and kids."

"Will do." And as I walked to the train's magnetic door, the man started playing Silent Night on his almost shredded guitar. I turned my back once more and gave a good look at him, he seemed lonely but at peace with his loneliness.

"Merry Christmas, Pan." Said I to the man.

"Merry Christmas, moje dziecko. Mercy on you." Said the man to me.

Entering the train, I embraced the backpack I was carrying on my torso, I sat by the window to gaze at that strange fellow once more. But I couldn't find him sitting on that bench anymore. It was as empty as if no one was ever there. An automatic voice on the radio announced the next station, the train started to move out, slowly and onwards.

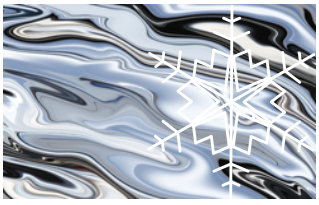
And then it started to snow.

Oh, White Christmas in Warsaw! How rare! A nice way to say goodbye to Warsaw for the night. The aromantic suburbs of Warsaw, I gazed at this banal landscape as if it was the first time I ever saw it, for the first time it seemed special.

'What a far out experience.' I thought. 'Who in God's name was that man?'

'…'

'Oh my sweet Jesus, now I get it!'





THE BOG BROTHER

lcn faun

It's like a bog down here man, I'm sickofallthisscum and wet sand. It's gotta lot of smells that'll makeaman up and leave. Ya see like under this house that is, like, under the boards and the basement, Ijust be diggin man. At first it was nice, what with the family gone I could be diggin all day. Andman, like my hands were cramping on that there pick handle. but since see I got that family bein here more and they got the heat on and it gets real dank. Realreal dank. But I don't mind that much, amansgotta deal with suchandthelike. It's the activity up there that really gets me prayin. Can't bepickin away and such when mawandpaw lounge in the basement, or themkids be racin and foolin around. Like so I'm just sittin here next to this puddle man, prolly not good for me and, yaknow, chemicalwiseandsuch. Shouldnt breathe too hard round... Anyway, like I'm saying, the family always is in the basement, and aman best not dig where he's heard.

You see, last lil tunnel I was workin me on was back up in Monticello. You don't know where that is, but anyway, I be diggin when the foreman of this, oh yea I'm diggin under this steel mill right? so this foreman here found my little hidey hatch, where I dun started carvin paths, and this foreman he tell me I've goneand trespassedonpropertyorsumthin. I didn't know it counted when you went that deep, so I gotup and got my ass outta there. He was gettin to pointificaytin on some lawyer talk and the like and I didn't plan to stick around and balk my way into some money trouble.

Yea so, here is pretty nice allthingsconsidered. I mean aside fromthe bogginess. You prolly like that, but I tellya I don't. No sir ree. I mean to tell ye last night, well, ok, so you see that sheet over there, on that little ledge I mined out? So that's were I've been sleepin right, now it and I was having some crazy dreams, practice-ly a snorin out my britches, and I wake up andmy own sweat, shit you not, drippin back downonme! It had gone and condensated up and then rained right back down. So you see I wake coughin and wheezin in my own sweat and you know my minds tellin me: sir, yougottagetouttahere. But you see it ain't no choice of my own right, soyou know like how we got this urge to blink ya can't fight, after a while? SoI get up on my feet, and I'm near the entrance and my mind is sayin "YOUNEED AIR! AIR! AIR!", so I ain't not gonna comply, and to my own begrudgingment I pop up into the basement and why, I tellya, it's like heaven's own cuppa water right down my lungs. Never have I ever gone andtaken a better breathe in my life sohelpme and then some.

But you see the problem is that one of them little boys was sleeping, and, ok well I ain't told nobody this but you right? so keep shush about it, no peepin. So the boy was on this here otto man, and his peanut-head and teeny hands be stickin out from a big ole blanket of his. But you see, the thing is, he was sleepin with his eyes open! Now, I know what you gon tell me, you gon say, well, that there boy was awake as the day, but listen Ilivetatellya that I sat there all exhasperated for a good half an hour and that boy didn't much move a inch. NotaninchItellyou. Not an inch at all. SoI get up and crawl back down here like nothin ever happen, and really it ain't. Just been keepin my own all this time since.

Did I show you what Ibeen diggin? Here let me pickya up. Okay ya see that I've got three pair-lel pathageways down this side, and what I did, I mean, what had happened was that I dug one right? And then I hit water, awhole little hollow pool of it cracked in. I think I could go down and swimif I wanted to. But anyway, I can't go much further, I mean I can't pick no water right? So I start diggin a second, and well, I ain't ivy league particularly so when I dig it pair-a-lel to the first to my dee-light it just endright up in the water again. Yep. Right up in it. So that's why the last one fit so far down there, cause I sure as shit didn't plan to risk pickin water again. Okay, let me get my galoshes and we'll walk down it andillshowyuaround.

They just boots I got from that there previously mentioned steel mill, but still, I call em galoshes since I been using them to keep the water out. So you see there sum water on the ground here, but I ain't pick no water this third time. Ibeen, okay look, see I'm buildin up church down this here passageway. Now before you say it, I know it ain't as holy as the real thing, no sir ree, no way. But I reckon it'll have a couple holes if the big man let me. So see how I architiculated it? You can't much build up with holes andshit, so I make the whole thing opposite way round. I been praying that godain't have no problem with the extremeties of my design. So look we got theseats inarow here, if ya please. I always did like the old long benches they got up in them cathedrals, but like see, they're dug in the ground now, well I guess we already in the ground... what would you call it... well anyway, sothey're kind of like trenches. And I been saying to god I'm very sorry bout the trenches, on account of their being in the war, it ain't got no place seenin the sanctification of the church. For I don't got much choice in the matter, I makedo with what Igot. The pulpit up here go real lowdown andwhat not. I spent a good day scoopin mud out that hole there before, well before water started springin up out it! So I try an take it like ole Moses did, but it ain't exactly the same, on account of it actually bein an inpeedament instead of a blessin and shit.

I tell you if one thing worked out all right though it's the choir, boy. So look, I dun dig them steps going down and down, and at the bottomsure enuff the water come pouring bout. So I said to myself "Heck with this, I ain't got no right buildin a holy place outta holes." and I went back and slept, and I was tossin and turning and I was angry asallgetout. The next morn I wake up and dress myself for another day of diggin, and as I'mwalkin down passageway number three I hear a great commotion, and I get closer and I'm telling myself "Great god almighty the choir singin!" and sure enuff I walk on in and the biggest toads you ever did see were croakinand a yellin in the puddle right on down them steps! Man if my old ass wasn't dancin that day and hoopin and hollerin along with them. They beenawful quiet since, just resting I guess.

Anyway, you prolly heard enuff of me and my pointificayshun, best we start the sermon I say. Gather you got your notes prepared? Thats good, Imma just place you on down in the water now, the pulpit ain't as scary as the real one cause they ain't all lookin up at ye high and mighty, so don't worry none bout givin a big speech. Yes, now just wait a minute while I go sit down, then thee floor is yours mister.

Alright! Can you hear me? I'm ready! Begin!

●●●

●●●

Ribbit
Amen! Amen!



submit to

magazine

PART I

Happy birthday, Kollen. Thank you everyone for coming to celebrate. He would have loved to see all of these faces. He would have loved to see what I can see. I know you all can see it too. We can all see him in our minds right now, ducking to avoid the attention—letting his middle finger slip.

Kollen Williams Miller was born on December 21 1984, in Mission Viejo, California, twelve hundred miles from where he spent his last days, his home away from his many homes—here we are. Kollen used to work here, at the Rio, and dead or alive Kollen might likely be here tonight on his birthday to catch the late screening of Die Hard, a loosely observed tradition. The last time we came here to watch Die Hard for his birthday we had to leave early and carry my girlfriend home.

Just over two weeks ago Kollen died in a car accident. He was my best friend. A real friend, ride or die.

The details surrounding his untimely death are tragic, as are the details surrounding a lot of his life story, beautiful and tragic. Kollen turned a lot of heads, and he left his mark on all of us, permanently. He was a beautiful human who worked in magic.

I would be lying if I said I didn't expect him to die young. Now that he is gone, there is almost a sad poetry to his story. Its a sad story. But its beautiful. I'll talk about that a little later.

Kollen came into the world to be remembered. There are lessons imparted onto us by him that have yet to serve a greater purpose, a purpose for which his life was wrought in perfect absolution, such that we, those who knew him, will become the beneficiaries of his beautiful message, beholden to his beautiful influence, and forever then the tellers and retellers of his beautiful story.

Kollen was survived by his mother, Holly. She has some words that I'd like to share on her behalf entitled Even as I grieve. (Bottom)

Kollen's mother was so important to him. Those close to him know, there was almost a sense that—pretty much his only job in life was to outlive her—for her sake. It's the truest evidence I have that his ambitions were cut short—that—I believe—he wanted to live. He burnt his wings. Kollen is a true legend now, definitively. Bless you.

I want to invite some people to speak now.

PART II

My name is [redacted]nd i've known kollen since high school, and although we spent our adult lives drifting in and out of sync, we grew to be best friends for years. Knowing kollen in so many deeply personal ways, I was afforded a very intimate view of his final days, his world. I was among those near him in the end. It has been so difficult for so many of you—for all of you—to have to hear the news and come to terms with this at a distance, maybe clambering for a memory, or left asking questions. And there are very few answers that make any sense. You knew him. You know what I mean. He knew you too.

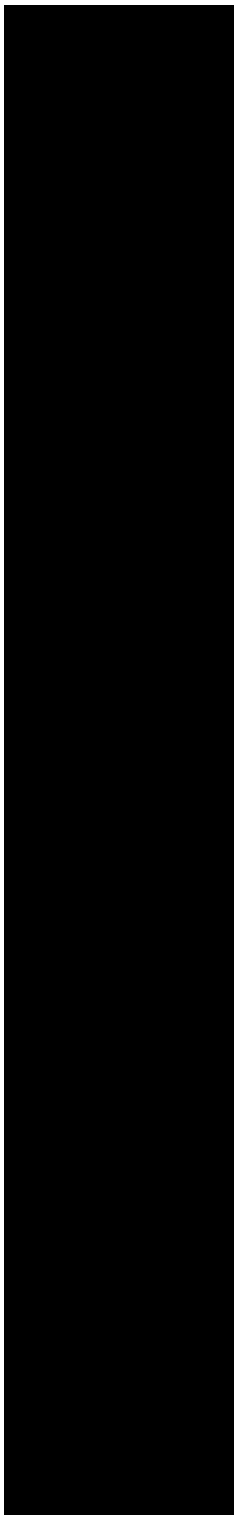
Kollen had a terrific memory. Some of my favorite times with Kollen were just him and i just remembering the old times, the good times, the bad times. He went many places and learned many things, some of which he traded with me, some I'll never know. The totality of who he was now lives on only in our memories. He never forgot his friends. Your silent voices are heard, here and now. That's all we really have. That's all there is. Legacy. One another.

It's been said more than once here that Kollen was remembered for being generous. I would know. He loved things with a fantastic passion. He was raised to be considerate and polite. He was enamoured by people and creatures and things. He felt for people. He had a lot of sympathy for the street.

It's not beyond me the often stark disparity between the amount of respect he showed for the world and the amount of respect he showed for himself. Kollen was the guardian of much innocence, and came to many people's defenses. He was—self destructive. This inversion of ethics, this—ironic contrast—is definitive of kollen. He was a walking, talking, breathing contradiction. I know how the universe deals with such lovely contradictions. Look at him go. There he was. He once whipped a skateboard at a dude's head who tried to pick a fight with me. Kollen was brave. Take a moment to remember kollen's fearlessness at some point tonight. I think it's a reflection of his young soul. I used to think he was an old soul because he was such an old man. But the truth is—he'll never be an old man. Another beautiful irony.

He suffered fears as well, just as we all suffer fears. His dark side took him to the brink— and beyond. Kollen's trauma was often internalized. And he cultivated darkness in order to escape this trauma. And he shamed himself for this darkness, the decisions that he made that went against his better self. He knew better. He was a good man. It is a ferocious feedback loop that—unfortunately—so many of us are familiar with. He hustled hard and he grinded. And sometimes he just—threw it all away. Was he a saint? I don't know. Was he a hero? Probably. He was among the best. The very fucking best of them.

It has become my privilege to know him, and it's about the most honor i've ever had to conjure on behalf of anybody i've ever known, this day, his day, his friends, my friends, my dearest, truest, deepest condolences. Happy birthday Kollen miller, my friend, the ghost. The craziest diamond i knew. Shine on.



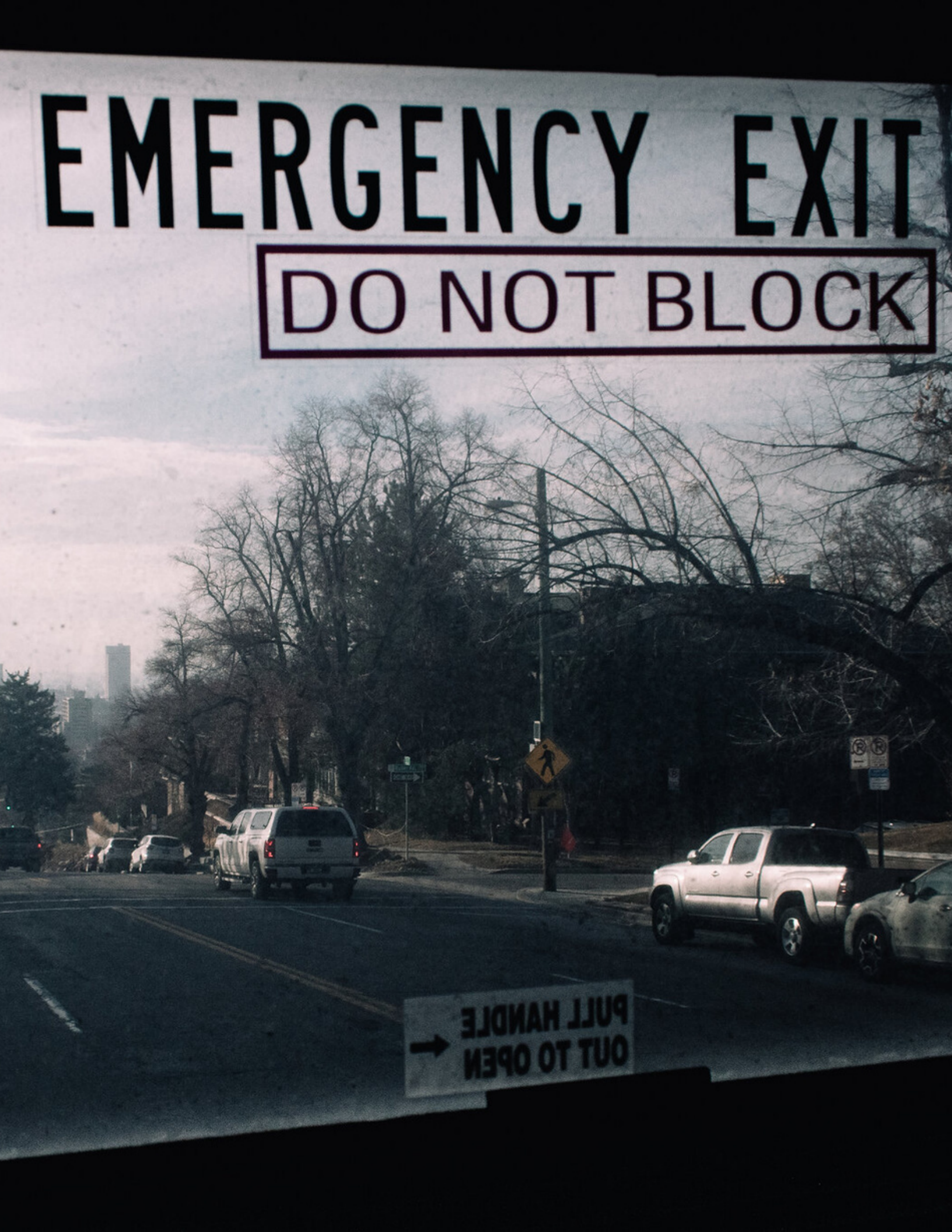

2021 .


Seven Stories
ACTS OF WORSHIP
MISHIMA, AESTHETIC TERROR
ACTS OF WORSHIP
a man with no talents
AUBREY de GREY, Ph.D.
with MICHAEL RAE
East of Eden
TopCare
70%
Isopropyl Alcohol
FIRST AID ANTISEPTIC
Helps Prevent the Risk of Infection in:
• Minor Cuts
• Minor Scrapes
• Minor Burns
16 FL OZ (1 PT) 473 mL
MAGIC RUB

VIEWS




EXIT


EMERGENCY EXIT
DO NOT BLOCK
PULL HANDLE
OUT TO OPEN

ano dyne
to me

Jan 1, 2022, 5:28 PM

shalom brother

***

"DOOMERS could be here" he thought, "I've never been on this board before. There could be DOOMERS anywhere." The warm PC exhaust felt good against his bare feet. "I HATE DOOMERS" he thought. There Is A Light That Never Goes Out reverberated all 200 square feet of his apartment, making it pulsate as the Pall Mall smoke circulated through his powerful thick trachea and washed away his (self-righteous) angst against those who wake up before noon. "With a 4Chan Pass, you can pseud wherever you want" he typed by himself, out loud.

***

My family called again. I'm not sure who. Might've been my dad. He's been on me lately about all sorts of stuff. There aren't enough hours in the day. I don't care that much for my family. I guess it sounds cold to say it. They raised me, they housed me and fed me and all that, but we were never that close. How much we like people and how much we get along with people are two independent axes. I get along with my family well enough, but that's all.

My day has been uneventful. I looked at a screen and got paid for it, then I looked at a screen for fun. The world keeps spinning.

I like going outside. It's peaceful. The best day of my life was a long walk to the grocery store on the other side of town. It took most of the day. I walked through some neighborhoods that I didn't know existed till then. I didn't speak to anybody. I almost got run over on a country road. One woman crossed to the other side of the road when she saw me. Oh well. The birds were chirping, my feet were moving. What more could you need?

I haven't gone outside today. I haven't gone outside in a while. I stay up till two in the morning, then I wake up around eight. I don't shower before work. What's the point? I wear dirty clothes. I don't want to go outside like this.

When I finished work for the day I was tired. I microwaved a couple precooked brats and ate them on a paper plate. I drank another cup of coffee before bed. I laid in bed. I haven't been within twenty feet of another person in a week. The weekend's coming soon. I think I'll sleep in. I should call my dad back. The world keeps spinning.

ano dyne
to me

Jan 22, 2022, 6:59 AM

every new day the december release is delayed is a new insufferable mspainting



ano dyne
to me

Jan 20, 2022, 7:17 PM

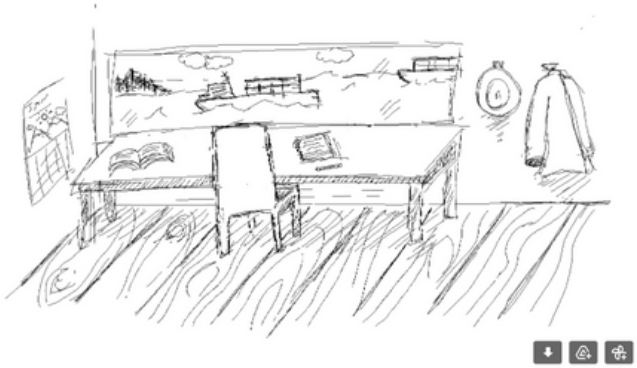
come back man



Activate Windows
Go to Settings to activate Windows

ano dyne
to me

Jan 22, 2022, 11:41 PM



ano dyne
to me

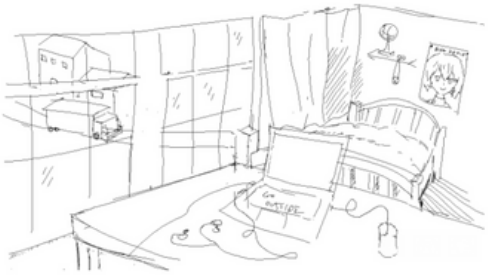
Jan 24, 2022, 9:38 AM



any day now, fagtron

ano dyne
to me

Jan 25, 2022, 1:18 AM



ano dyne
to me

Jan 30, 2022, 3:12 PM

sorry to disappoint



ano dyne
to me

Feb 2, 2022, 6:58 PM



ano dyne
to me

Feb 3, 2022, 2:42 PM



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ano dyne <archivemonologue@gmail.com>
to me

Feb 4, 2022, 2:09 PM



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ano dyne
to me

Feb 5, 2022, 12:51 AM



what do you say to weekly uploads instead, old pal?

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Weeaboo Jones
to me

Thu, Mar 24, 5:45 PM

oozed

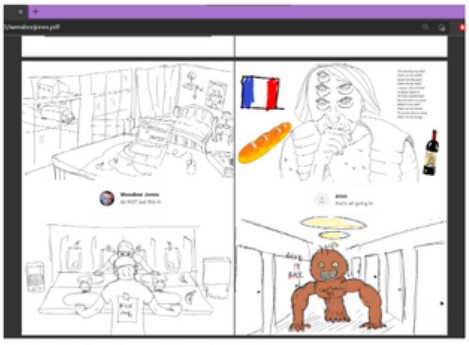


do NOT put this in

Weeaboo Jones
to me

Sat, Apr 2, 10:52 PM

i'm flattered, but here's a proposal for something far more succinct. i'd suggest leaving me out of the story and poem and putting those somewhere else in the issue. i'm not nearly that cool. try to have the following be next to each other like this in the full issue, too.



also, try not to circumcise my photography like that.






I drank the sea
I have to pee

I was falling from the sky. Not free-falling, no, but imagine instead a submarine on a calculated trip to the ocean floor. No leaks through the hull, no panicked crewmembers on the verge of claustrophobia-induced insanity, but instead a routine survey at the bottom of the sea mediated by calm, experienced sailors. Supporting me on my descent were these hairless humanoids, holding me by my forearms. Their skin was covered in scales that shone in a spectrum from blue to yellow, depending on which angle you looked at them, and their jet-black lips were no larger than a pen clip, yet entirely capable of emoting along with their mostly human eyes and facial muscles. The men and women only differed in height and the presence or absence of featureless, almost imperceptibly small breasts; their crotches were all smooth and bare. As I was studying the anatomy of the one holding my right forearm to guess its sex, the Earth's surface - or whatever planet we were on - emerged from the fog. Pink specks were shuffling in a flesh-tone ocean, like a carpet of maggots on a wet pile of trash. A smell of rank sweat and stale urine hit me. Turning to the being on my right again, I asked where they were taking me in desperation. The floating entity didn't say a word, but instead smiled and flickered its eyes like an aged lightbulb. Suddenly, I was drained of all desire. I had the notion that this rush of contentment wasn't mine, but I wholeheartedly accepted the feeling of serenity with abandon. I lost awareness of everything, fear of everything, of where I was, of who I was, of where I was sinking to. All of my anxiety gave way to unquestioning trust in the opalescent, levitating gecko-woman holding me and the living ocean it was slowly leading me towards - until individual outlines started to emerge from the vibrating mass below.

The brownish maggots were disembodied penises the size of grown men. Twitching, writhing, ejaculating, deaf, blind. I wanted to scream, but I clenched my teeth and bit my tongue instead, afraid the ones holding me would loosen their grip reflexively. Maybe all of the penises below wanted to scream too, I thought - even if they had the mouths and lungs to do so, they wouldn't so much as hear their own cries. The stench multiplied and made my unblinking eyes water.

Another group of floating lizard-people were carrying someone that looked like last semester's linear algebra professor down into the ceaselessly spurting abyss. As much as I tried to deny it, he wasn't struggling or crying. No, he didn't show the slightest sign of resistance. Until all I could see of his head was his signature combover as he fell further below, I saw him smiling from ear to ear. His feet were dangling carelessly, like he was on a ski lift.

The shiny flying reptilians pushed apart some of the penises to reveal the dark green ground that resembled the translucent glass on an old wine bottle. When his soles touched it, his legs crumpled like a flattened paper crane, its distinct muscles and bones all warping into a vaguely spherical heap. His abdomen then protruded, covering his contorted lower limbs entirely, leaving a pair of wrinkled lumps the same size and shape as slightly deflated beach balls directly below his belly button. The concave depression where his stomach once was then flattened out like a tooth filling. The volume to occupy the cavity was taken from his arms and hollowed flaps of skin were left behind.

The armless creature with nascent testicles for legs still exuded that chilling serenity. He looked up at the beings that brought him there, which had risen to a distance far enough to not be ejaculated on, and smiled again, beaming in a way foreign to an aging academic. Carelessly wide-eyed, he then turned to face me. The disfigured scholar held eye contact with me for what felt like an eternity, until I heard a sharp snap through the cacophony of meaty, dull slaps.

His spine collapsed. His face froze in that satisfied expression and then smashed into the newly wrinkled skin of his scrotum. A new layer then grew to encompass the rest of his limp body, now a beige rather than a dark, woodlike brown, reaching above his head and pinching tightly like an end of a sausage. Everything above and including his shoulders fused into each other, becoming a single cylindrical mass. The area around his head expanded until all the skin covering it stretched taut into a bell-like shape.

The other man-penises then tumbled back into place as if they were welcoming him. I watched the writhing mass with bated breath, expecting the grizzled intellectual to break free from his foreskin-cocoon and fly upwards to grab me by the hand so we could escape together, miles above this obscene Hell. A rope of semen soaked the sole of my right foot, but my attention didn't waver. Finally, something started to emerge from below.

Were his legs unfolding to support his own weight? Were his arms growing back to push the squirming masses away? Was that beige mass his shoulders rising from that fetid pit? Of course not. I was embarrassed to have even entertained the thought once an engorged, pink bell emerged from the swelling lump.

Supported by its testicles, I absentmindedly stared down the barrel of its urethral meatus in a nauseated stupor. Upright for probably the last time, it jerked back and forth, but still stood until a white jet shot towards me with a visceral squelch and submerged my head and chest in a salty sludge. I screamed immediately, but a split-second later reduced my wails to a muffled whine once a viscous rivulet of the professor's goo fell into my mouth. Through a translucent film covering my eyes, I could hardly make out the unknowing assailant fall supine into the indistinct masses.

To my relief, the semen wasn't transformative, but only telepathic. I now understood that every one of the erupting heaps below were once people, men and women alike. Yes, the mutagenic, glassy soil below them supported their metabolic needs in every respect, meaning they all would ejaculate and twitch about until the sun burnt out. No, they weren't suffering; it was a deafblind, nigh-eternal ecstasy for every turgid penis. Silent and invisible expressions of otherworldly pleasure were psychically transferred through skin-to-skin contact and sperm-borne transmission to make the euphoria from the continuous, body-wide orgasms communal.

A wetness exploded from my thighs and I tensed up from head to toe like a tetanus patient. They weren't communicating nonverbal moans, but instead transferred every aspect of their emotions with them. The twitches and ejaculate sprays from orgasms, in other words, shared their ecstasy from of a body-wide orgasm to anyone in the vicinity. Others were then brought to climax to perpetuate an ecstatic, decadent eternity.

They were just as clueless about the role of the airborne humanoids that condemned them to the fleshy abyss, if not more in the dark about their origins and motivations. It was even less of a concern to them, obviously. They could never turn back. They could never want to.

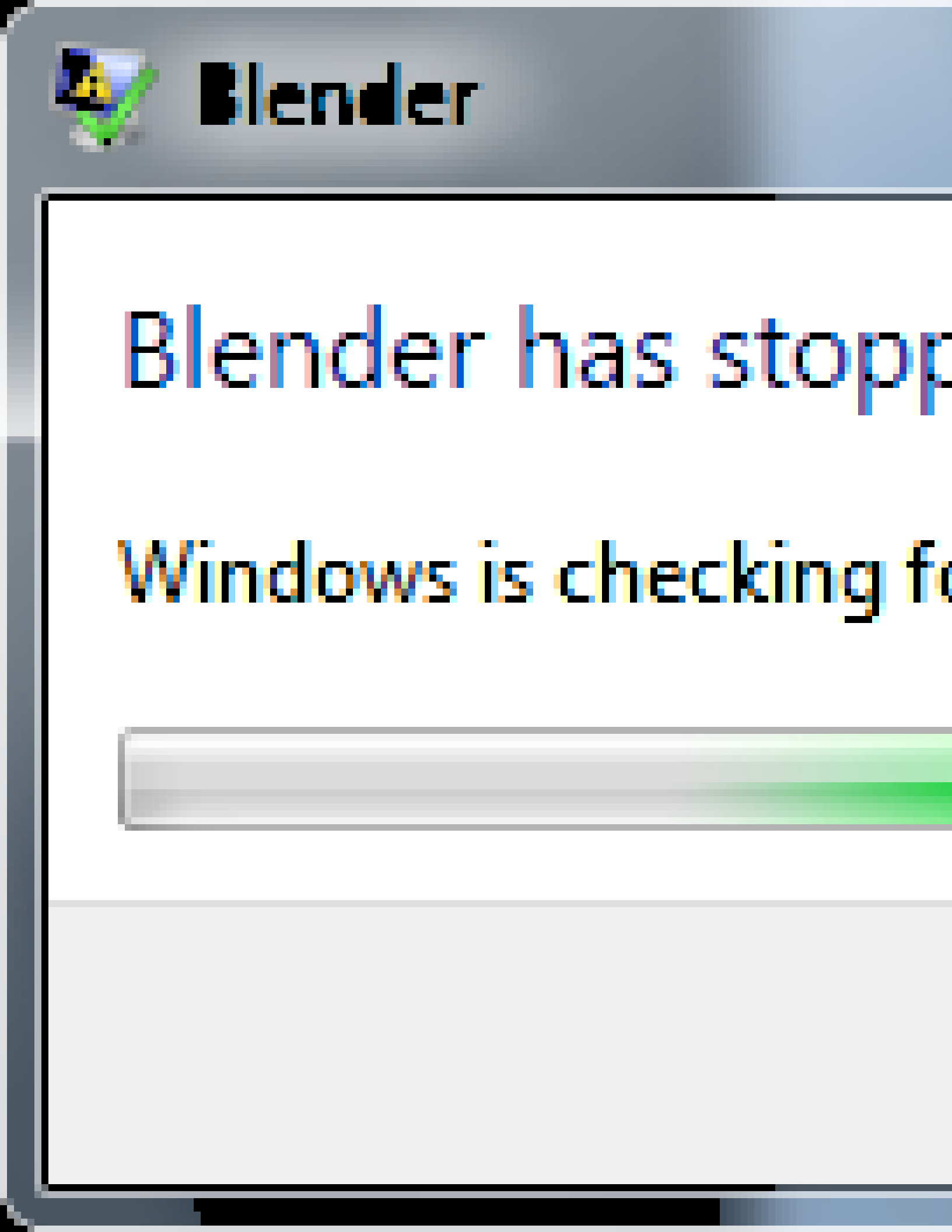
But as the dreamer here, this was ultimately my world. As I had made the man-penises and their temptations, I too was able to escape them. The entities that had brought me there, as merely creations of mine, broke their grip the moment I started to wrestle my arms from them.

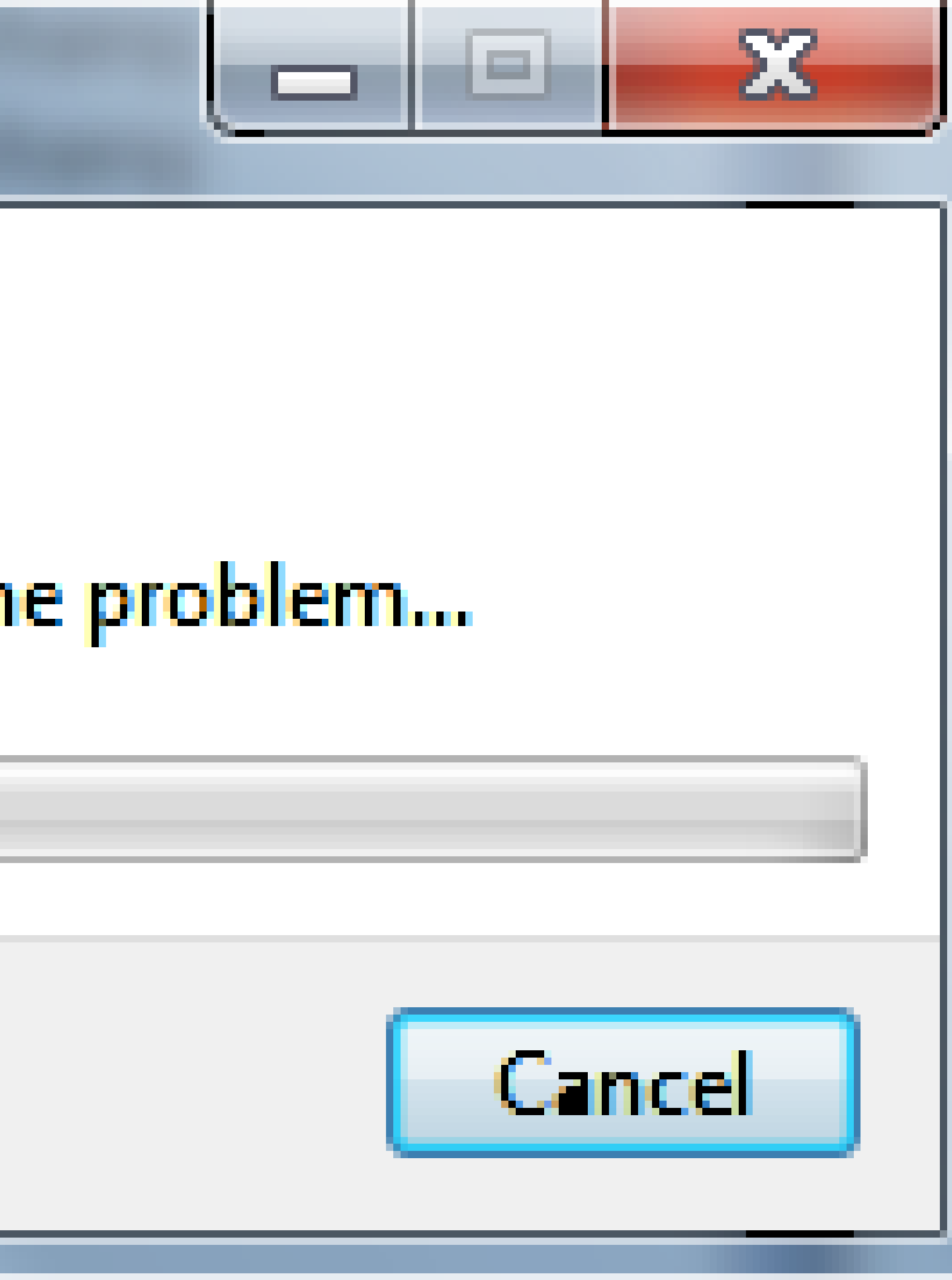
Then, I flew. I flew until the penises were obscured again by their body heat induced steam. I flew until the scaly beings fell behind. I flew until the grey planet fell behind. I flew until I woke up.

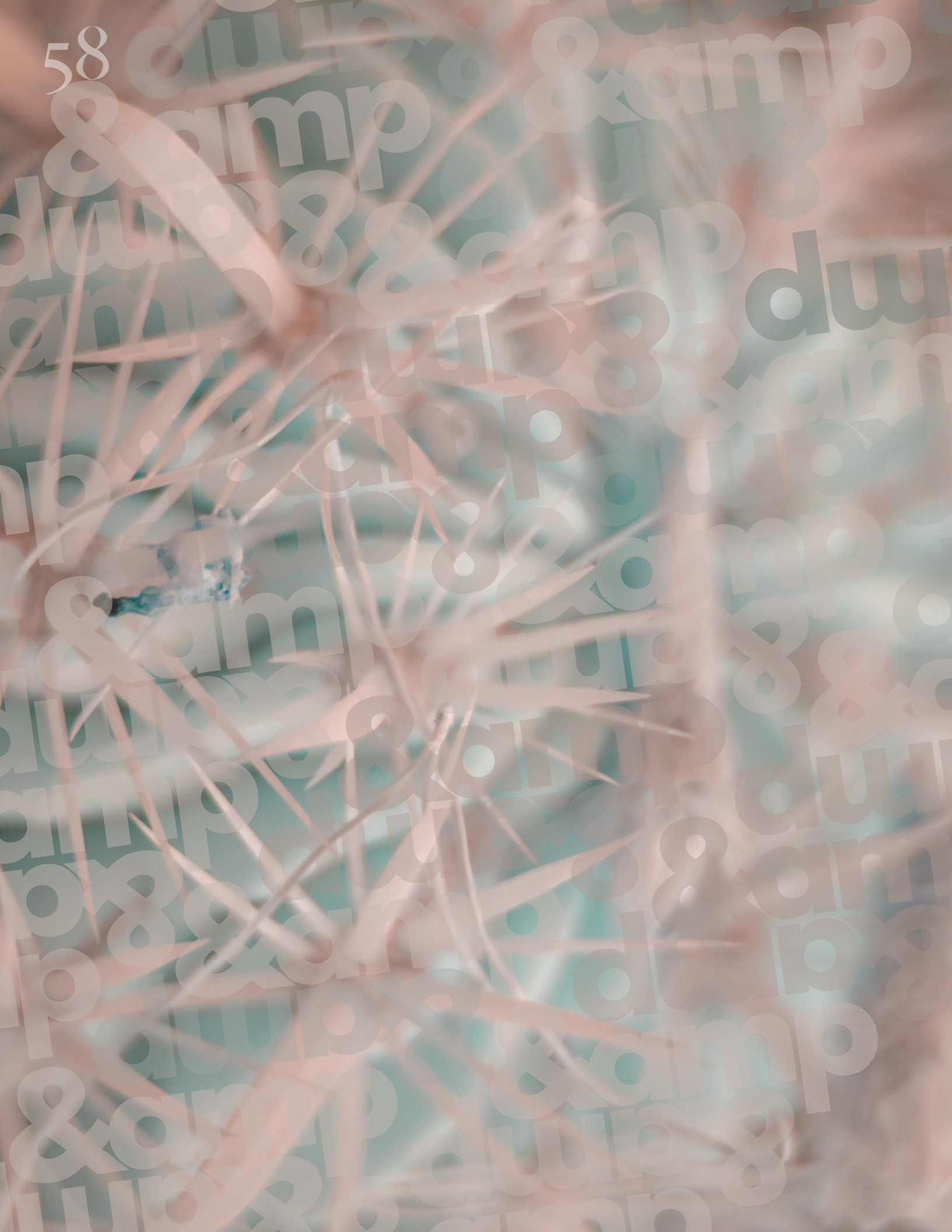
by Anonymous

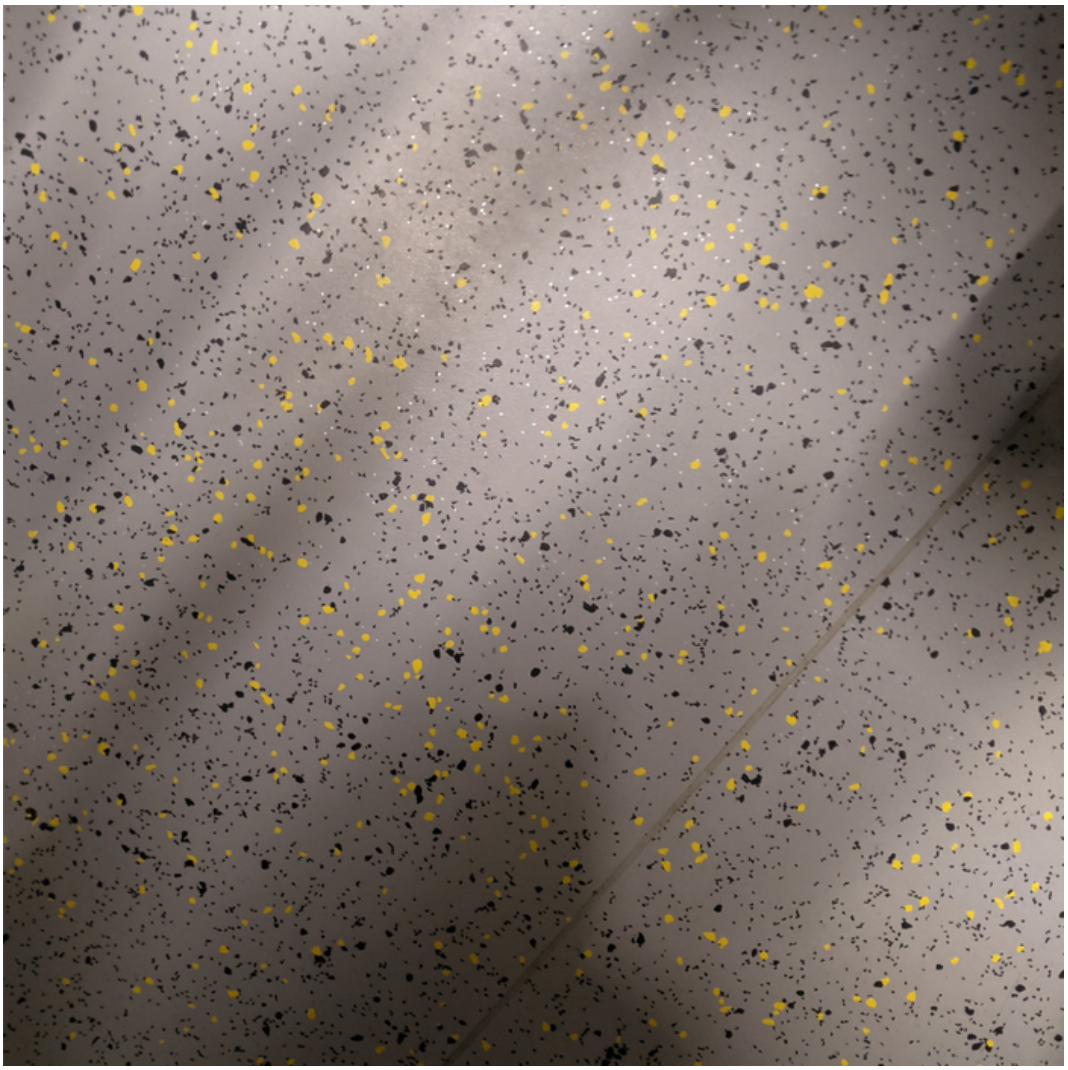





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Void

by Ogden Nesmer

Not long ago I was apprehended by the authorities and placed in custody, under what is known as a fifty-one-fifty hold. This means, at the time of my arrest, I was designated a potential danger to myself and others. I do not recall the circumstances that brought me apparently to carry a small, unregistered weapon into a convenience store that night, nor the preceding events. But I am assured by professionals that it did in fact happen and that I was in a state of disassociation, unable to make myself understood.

I am told that this is why I have been placed here, and why I am forbidden from leaving. Furthermore, I am required by law to attend regular therapy sessions and to maintain a clear and honest relationship with Glenn, my mental health coordinator. My cooperation with the program is essential. Soon I will be able to plead my case and my sanity before a judge at a special hearing. Then I will be free again.

Captivity is not so bad: there are board games and puzzles and televisions mounted in the high corners of the community spaces. They're kept in cages and play only black-and-white sitcoms. My room has a window, and presently I have it all to myself (this is favorable; isolation isn't a problem for me and many of the other residents have issues that keep them and their roommates up for hours during the night).

Because I am an exemplary resident I am allowed to walk the premises as I please, in and outside, with the exception of those floors restricted for the deranged and violent. Much of the staff knows me by first name and they find me very pleasant.

There are other residents who range in their capacity for rational thought and extended conversation. All of them are peaceful, or have at least not expressed their violent ideation. Many of them happen to be women, but they all differ in age and ethnic background. I have taken a sympathetic, almost paternal role with some of them. I am one of the few expected to leave soon and return to a productive and someday respectable life. Naturally, they see potential in me. Perhaps they also see a means to communicate with an otherwise hostile and alien world waiting outside the walls. One they may never see, or understand.

Several times a week I lead a handful of the other, less capable residents on a short walk around the exterior of the facility. There is a small pine grove with a winding dirt path and a pond adjacent to the main building. It is normally gray and cold out, but the fresh air is good for all of us. I also appreciate the responsibility. The fact that the staff trusts in me to lead the others, albeit for a short time, has given me the confidence I'll need to do well in my hearing and my life outside the facility.

I've written these thoughts down to tell Glenn at our next meeting. I believe I'm doing very well.

Anna is an older Spanish woman, committed by her daughter, with severe dementia and too much energy to be left alone. I often see her humming softly as she waddles between therapy and her scheduled activities, followed by a solemn, attentive nurse. Elle, a younger girl, is suicidal but making good progress. Like most young people she can be easily coerced into talking about herself at length and I enjoy listening, until her thoughts are broken off by tears and sobbing and I find someone to help. Cedric is another resident committed by the justice system, like me. His situation is tragic but it is not at all shocking. Cedric is easily agitated and reacts to stimuli in his mind. He avoids eye contact and mumbles. He is also massive. Despite himself he is inherently intimidating. One can not be in a prolonged conversation with him without the threat of an outburst, which alienates him from the other residents. It is sad to see, and I feel that underneath his ailment Cedric is essentially just a very frightened young man.

Then, of course, there is Bob.

I meet with all of the residents on their own terms, as a comrade in custody. I have learned much from them and I sincerely believe that they have benefitted from my attention. Unlike staff, the residents often are not able to recognize me, due to their afflictions. I meet with them as a stranger. Our conversations and the relations we build dissolve with the passing of another day, and the next, and so forth.

It does not deter me; I genuinely care for them. I have even considered entering the field of mental health after my release. It speaks to me, and it may be my true calling (another positive thing to tell Glenn).

Bob is by far the most confounding resident.

Bob arrived voluntarily, a long time before me. He doesn't antagonize any of the residents or staff but they do not seem to like him very much. I can see why. Bob often appears irritated and resentful, but always quiet. In the morning he gets into the same chair, every day, for hours until it is time to go back to bed. Bob seems weary of the rest of us and of life. The staff does not encourage him to participate in the activities offered and they take little interest in his overall progress. A rumor I've heard from Elle is that they lock him into his own room at night, but no one knows why. I have not seen this and cannot verify. He watches us from the corner of the room, grimacing, hardly moving.

I've spoken with him quite a bit.

Bob explained to me that he has lived before– many times before, in fact. So many times that he has now lost count. His life begins in a suburb up north about fifty years ago. After his life, he dies, and when he has died he has always woken up the next morning, an infant again in this old familiar home.

Bob says the first time he was reincarnated it was unbelievable, but eventually he became very hopeful; who wouldn't feel grateful to experience their youth again, keeping all the learned wisdom of their later years? After the initial trauma of infancy (evidently a very horrifying experience once imbued with the consciousness of an adult– the shock of complete helplessness: limbs and spine too weak to do anything but struggle, the body shudders in rapid growth– bones forming, skull sealing, teeth rising to the surface of tender gums– all colored by the regular, unavoidable visitations of shit, vomit, snot, emotion, etc.) his second life was generally full of victories. He impressed his peers, displayed uncanny insight, and reveled in sexual and financial triumph.

This was repeated for the third, fourth, fifth times. After several lives and deaths– rather, the same life leading into many different deaths, ranging from mundane to unpredicted to horrendously, regrettably painful– Bob started to see his situation with less enthusiasm. The problem, Bob says, was that he was trapped. He grew but the world around him was stuck on repeat. Immortal only in theory, he had power but no control.

Somewhere around the thousandth iteration, says Bob, that's when the days began to truly fade into another. He sought this place as a refuge, a shelter from the world he was terrified to experience again.

I sought more information on Bob from the staff's records, but residents are not allowed access to these kinds of documents. I was even reprimanded for being nosy– a woman behind the counter wagged her finger threatening that this might get back to Glenn. The others are poor sources of information. Depending on who one is asking Bob is either a government agent, an alien, completely invisible, or a doppelgänger slowly trying to replace Kiki (Kiki is a paranoid schizophrenic who typically shrieks in an inarticulate jargon– getting any cohesive statements out of her is noteworthy, even if it yields questionable results).

Kiki had an accident once. It was on one of my walks, while she was supposed to be under my supervision. I wasn't paying attention and she began to walk straight into the pond and got her ankle stuck on a root. She fell over into the water and almost drowned in two feet of muck because she couldn't free herself. She was only helped after the rest of us heard her wailing in her distinct gibberish.

The staff was lenient with me but I still feel terrible. How could I forget something so important? I've tried to discuss my memory issues with Glenn, but I don't believe he's as concerned. As a representative of the justice system his interest is in addressing my antisocial tendencies and any potential access to weapons.

It dawns on me that it has been some time since my last meeting with Glenn, and it unsettles me. The specter of my upcoming hearing looms in my mind. Will the judge be told of my mistake in letting Kiki almost drown? Would Glenn be obligated to tell them? Should I tell Glenn that I have dreams about it constantly– only in the dreams I don't hear Kiki struggling. I simply rise out of bed, run to the pond and find her because I know she is there, lying face-up just under the surface. She is impossibly placid– a state of being Kiki has never known. Her expression is so stoic that at once I realize she needs my help. I dive in, into the complete blackness where the sound of Kiki's screams have been hiding in wait and flood my ears.

Bob says he knows me already. He says that has met me in many of his previous lives. I always tend to show up to the facility some time after him, he says. I like to entertain the possibility that what I can't believe may be true, and so I ask him if I've changed over all the times he's known me. Is it possible that somehow, over a span of different realities, like one singular passing of time– if "I" even exists in this sense– I have grown?

He does not seem confused by the question (perhaps I've already asked him) but his answer is simply "no."

Bob knew my parents' names, without me telling him.

I see Glenn, but it is only in passing in the hallway. I am very relieved to see him. I understand completely that he is the only man here who stands in the way of me achieving my freedom. I can think only of how to impress him, ways to assure him that I am ready and all he needs to do is let me through. But I don't want him to misinterpret any of my actions. I don't want him to know how much I fixate on things: my hearing, my memory loss, Kiki, Bob.

"How are you, Glenn?"

"I'm good."

"How's Kiki, Glenn?"

"She's good."

He is gone again.

Bob has a nervous habit, a distinct vocal tick. Bob is generally whisper-quiet when stuck in one of his vocal loops, but if one listens they can hear it whispered throughout the halls of the facility. Many of the residents have some similar sort of verbal issue, aside from those who simply babble and scream and weep, but Bob's is unique. I have heard him whispering and I have asked Bob– who seems to be a somewhat rational, if clinically delusional, human being– what's the deal?

Bob's tick involves repeating his own name, again and again, over and over:

"Bobobobobobobobobobobobobobobobob-" steadily and softly.

I've asked Bob about his private ululations and he's elaborated: his name is suited for this kind of repetition in many peculiar ways: it is palindromic, and monosyllabic, for one. It is phonetically unambiguous. Further, in repeating it so insistently, it appears to be more than it is (i.e. whereas "bobobobobob" appears to be the repetition of "bob" five times, "bob" as a discrete morpheme appears only three times, separated by solitary "o"s– a phonemic placeholder synchronistically the same as the only one found in the repeated morpheme, Bob's actual name (i.e. with a different placeholding phoneme ("bobababobababob") the separation between morphemes is obvious) which ultimately has no formal meaning– the resonant characteristic and the underlying orthogeny still lend the utterance a quasi-spiritualistic importance as in a mantra, or prayer, or incantation– except as Bob's name). I admit to Bob it is fascinating, but I still don't understand.

Sometimes I catch myself saying the word.

Bobobobobobobobobob.

Kiki no longer accompanies me on my walks.

I didn't even notice at first, but it must be this whole week and longer that she hasn't been out walking behind me. Is she doing activities? Sitting alone in her room? How can I possibly ask the staff? To ask them is to admit I am as mentally adrift as the rest. They will lose their faith in me and forget me. Surely they must already know, but they smile at me like nothing is wrong. It's probably already too late: their deepest suspicions have only been confirmed. I am beyond help.

My hearing should be in just a few days. Glenn should know, but I can never reach him. I have to put my trust in a man who always seems to be in the other room. This is the nature of the system, I scoff to myself. Bob is whispering:

Bobobobobob

Elle has bad dreams too. She dreams mostly about her father who used to beat her when she was very small. The image of a man four times larger than her, striking her viciously from above, has burned itself in her mind. Sometimes she has dreams where she is not being terrorized by her father exactly but by some other terrible figure with the same imposing proportions. She says that while they aren't always her father they are always someone she knows. Dreams are constrained like this; we can dream of anything, except those things we can't.

I told her about Bob's name.

"Like Anna."

I don't understand.

Elle says that because Anna's name is a palindrome it can exhibit the same properties as Bob's name, but I explain to her politely that this is not the case: "Anna" repeated can not yield the same verbal illusion. It is disyllabic, and the phonemes on either end are confused– textually identical but fundamentally, deceptively different (A_1= [æ], A_2= [ʌ]; i.e. pure typographic repetition (e.g. "annaannaannaannaanna") is clumsier, incorporating phonetic ambiguity (i.e. textual renderings implies no phonetic difference between "anananananana" and the aforementioned, however phonemic difference between A1 and A2 disrupts convergence of discrete morphemes) the middle of "Anna" being not any open-mouthed, resonant ohm-like vowel but a pedestrian sneer of disgust, the voiced nasal nnn- (opposing the complete holistic unity of sound/signifier/signifigance in entity [bob]) forcing an ugly lurch of the jaw, a removal from a harmonious trance of perfect repetition) but she doesn't follow.

"What about Kiki?"

What about Kiki?

"Poor Kiki," she says almost to noone, and stares out over the pond through the gray air, then shrugs.

I don't understand.

I want to speak to Glenn but the staff can't tell me where he is. I want to ask him about my hearing but the staff only wants me to calm down and they threaten again to tell Glenn about my behavior, so I depart quietly. It should be tomorrow or the next day and I don't know what to say. I don't know how these things work and I desperately want to seem prepared, and professional, and sane.

Bob is in the corner. I don't hear him but his lips are moving.

It can sometimes be very hard to think around the other residents. I am trying hard not to forget anything anymore, but sometimes I can't concentrate indoors. I have been taking more walks lately, often unaccompanied. Luckily the staff still feels confident enough in me to allow me this relief from my torment.

I will wait outside of Glenn's office door, for hours if I have to. I will look crazy– even if I smile and act friendly, I will look crazy, I know it– but I need to talk to him about my hearing. Sane men care about their fates and about the miscarriage of justice. I should want to be out of here because I do not belong.

I ask Bob if he's ever considered killing himself, and he is bored by the question. He tells me suicide was a phase he went through, somewhere around his twentieth pass. It was there that he actually began to lose count. He assumes it took maybe a hundred attempts to fully realize that death wouldn't solve his problem.

I ask him what phase came next in his lives and he tells me he then studied for a long time. Reading anything, seeking out experts in all fields, trying to find a rational explanation– even an irrational one, so long as it provided results. It involved less dying than his previous phase but it was ultimately as fruitless. In his studies Bob simultaneously gained a deep dissatisfaction with the material universe and the facts of reality. Beyond those tiny facts, he says with supposedly over a thousand lived years devoted purely to the pursuit of knowledge, nothing is true nor is it relevant. Entropy takes all but the sterile facts, rendered meaningless in their separation from one another, with no one to construct truth out of the free-floating parts.
Bob says that effectively everything is the same, and everything is pointless.

The dream is different now, and it's longer. I get out of bed just the same but now I'm looking for Glenn, wandering through the halls and feeling the drywall for vibrations of sound. He is somewhere on the other side of whichever one I happen to be touching. His voice is muffled but omniscient. The syllables are all off, but somehow I know the word he is whispering:

Bobobobobobob

I leave, and I feel strangely as though the pace of my movement is out-of-tune with the beat of my steps. I am drifting, but my legs thrash as if I'm running.

I find myself at the pond, but Kiki can not be seen. The water is so dark, and someone is standing on the other side, so I start to run around to them. I can still hear Bob's name whispered behind me. She is crying, not in real words. Scrambled phonemes and poor little whimpers. I can see the bottom of the pond, black twisted roots sunk in the scum, but I see no Kiki.

I am walking around the pond, and I believe I am awake. Bob is by my side.

I ask him what is on the other side. Bob is the only man I've ever known to come back from the dead with his memories: what happens after we die?

Hell tells me nothing happens because nothing can happen. There is no time, no consciousness, no soul. There is nothing.
I am not surprised; I'm bored with Bob now. I feel he has little to show for all his supposed experience. I offer him my curiosity and I plead for advice but all he does is lead me in circles. He can't admit it but his mind is rotten with the age of his past lives, which of course are themselves figments of his psychological condition.

My hearing was two days ago. I don't recall it, but I'm told I did well. As for when I will be able to leave I hope for an answer from Glenn. I am eager to see him, but I'm told that I have seen him, that I see him often, and that he has only positive things to say.
I'm beginning to think it would be wrong to release me. That I belong here. I spend more time now confined to a chair, like Bob, with my head tilted up to one of the imprisoned televisions.

We've reached the other side of the pond. It's cold and quiet and the water is too dark to see through. I can hear whispering behind me, like the hushed sound of popping corn. It isn't done for me but I know Bob is aware of how it torments me. He can feel me the same way I feel him, I can tell. I accuse him of being a fool for having been tricked so thoroughly by me. Without really thinking I tell Bob how his previous lives have simply been days in the facility. He is mad, and I have been stringing him along for my own entertainment. I don't know why but I have the urge to hurt Bob like this, but he doesn't seem bothered. Instead he asks me about Kiki, and then laughs as if he's told a joke. I don't understand.

My dream has evolved. It has repeated itself so many times it has forced itself to grow into something freshly disturbing. In the dream I do nothing, and there is nothing, simply gray fog all around me everywhere. But I feel the presence of the pond, Kiki's body under the water, and Bob, all somewhere out in the fog. I sit and wait for the dream to be over, voluntarily confined. It doesn't frighten me but it is terrible to endure.

I no longer see Elle. Residents are not privy others' medical information, so I cannot know what has happened to her. I believe she has chosen to kill herself but I cannot verify. None of the other residents seem to notice.

As the days pass and I begin to lose count I think often about my arrest, which I do not remember. I have only the words of others to inform me as to the details of that night. The picture I have does not make sense. My memories are too broken and I feel I can no longer trust the flashes of the past that I do recall. Everything is suspect. Like facts at the end of the universe, as Bob tells me, events are disconnected in my mind and there is ultimately no "me" that can be fabricated from the free-floating thoughts. I have been freed, in a sense.

The staff, Bob, and the occasional new resident stop by my chair. They say things to me. They whisper in soft intonations I do not understand, although I am confident that they are words. Fricatives and affricates, voiced alveolars and bilabial plosives; all the same, all pointless.



Shane studied the street from her view in the building, her form cloaked at the window in the umbrage of the skyline. Inside she stood draped in leather. The curl of her hair was bound in ropes and her eyes rove out before her. She addressed her associate, a shorthaired woman who sat at the bar behind her and who made her work on a screen in her lap.

How long do I have? Shane adjusted her earpiece.

I doubt the first one's hit the highway yet. The woman's legs hung crossed and her fingers tapped. The lobby was lit in amber and a small body of patrons bustled at the lounge behind them.

Shane turned to her assistant.

Maybe ten minutes? That's Zane I mean. He's about ten minutes out assuming he hasn't hit the highway yet.

Zane was the first one? Are we making a list? I don't have any names. She turned to continue her study of the streets below.

Her associate arranged her screen onto the bar and began replacing some gear into a field bag. There's no list. Those were just the callsigns I picked up. Zane's number one. Then Petrovic. Then —she pulled a phone closer in her hand —then Dracca. I'll cache my scans and make a list on the fly after I'm out there.

Shane looked at her wristwatch and back. Reflected in the window was the hallway to the elevators and in the same hallway was the door to her retreat. She eyed it and considered her strategy and whispered to herself. Fearless. A man emerged from the hallway, a bellhop. Her gaze went back to survey the city. A motorcycle rang down the pike and around a wheelless car and away. The rain chopped in the streetlight. A hooded figure rose from the tunnel. She turned and motioned with her head. You'd better get. I've got a visual on target number three. She looked at her associate and she looked back out the window. Over the car and the pike and up the streets the figure came toward her. Across the lounge a group of hearty men enjoyed their last laugh and she turned and started for the hallway looking into her wrist.

I'll keep you on my radar and meet you —? Her assistant waited.

Follow him. She spoke as she passed. That's where I'm going after I check the metro.

I'll call you if I'm not gonna make it.

Jule. Shane frowned and continued. Your head is safe. Nothing hiding in there. A smile gave.

Besides genius? Jule watched her walk away into the hallway and through a door Shane made her exit. May I? She beckoned the bartender.

Shane stood in the concrete stairs of the fire escape and looked to her wrist and turned her head in consideration before moving to her descent. She thought about the nature of a trap. She carried herself down around halfpace rails until she reached a sign that read 5 and looking on she chose a door and stepped through it. She came into a hallway by the middle of which spanned a large open window, its curtain flickering in the wind. She went to it and pulled her coat from her shoulders and hung it out the window by a metal catch and tied the curtain and without a word sprung up and over the ledge.

In the wind of the lane the slicker rippled like a torn banner as she clung to an anchor aside the tower. She laughed at herself but instantly the pepper of gunfire gave her a start. She swung her head to the other side and back again. Her fixture supported a silver colored rope and by it she loosed herself down the side of the glass. Black and white her striped reflection spelunking for freedom mirrored in the light of the lampstandards before she kicked and let the cable slack to a plumb drop. The flash and rattle of a blast detonated from around the corner of the building. She touched the street and made a dash through the lane and around the tower and out to the street and onward she paced across the pike and through the window of a burnt sedan. She jostled and peered out like a mouse. The shooting continued. She studied the lobby in the sky. From across the pike at the tower the sound of weapons would break the din and by this she measured the ongoing duel. The chip and snap of her earpiece let through a small voice.

Shane you copy over?

She touched her ear. Copy twenty over? I'm still here. It's—the sound cracked in her ear—but it's pretty bad. Spilled my rum and coke. Fuckers.

A burst of glass and fire came from the building as the window wherein she once stood came apart in a clap and the stutter of gunfire rose for a moment and tapered. Her eyes flared before the skirmish that erupted half hidden. Smoke broke from the black and empty window.

Jule you copy over?

The sound fuzzed in and out of her ear. I'm here Shane. You watching the show? I'm going seven. Just for a bit. Keep an eye on those targets and be mine by—she looked at her wrist—quarter after over.

Quarter after tenfour. Stay safe. Over out.

She dragged herself from the car and hurried to the tunnel entrance and glanced at the tower. The distant popping continued and a siren rang out on some other street. Down the stepwell she made herself in bounds until the light from the street faded and she stepped down in darkness. She immediately concerned herself with the darkness. No cops. Her voice was silent. She adjusted her watch and a ray of light pointed from her wrist and led her down to the platform. She studied the floor, the walls. Her arm stood out from her side and its light guided her to a closed door that had across it the perforations of spent ammunition. She peered through the keyhole cavities and counted them while she solved herself. The door unsealed as she leaned against it and fit herself halfway through to illuminate and inspect the room. She turned and leaned back and replaced the door and stepped away and as she found herself down the platform to its edge her arm beamed and navigated, a bowsprit in the black subterrain shallows.

There was a hollow quiet in the tunnel of the underground and Shane cleft it carefully with her steps, soft and wide. She cambered down and onward and when her light touched the train she shook her head. She withdrew a metal baton from herself and pulled it tall and squeezed her grip until the tip charged in a spark of blue and white. With her weapon ahead she carried on and made her way before the line and studied the tunnel and crouched. She spun and peered along the side of the train yet unseen and as she searched she reconciled the image of a ragged body in the light. A drainpipe leaked. She approached and the body stirred and made its address.

Knew I'd see you again.

She knelt and set her baton beside her on the gravel and removing her glowing wristwatch she fastened it to the train. From her ankle she produced a tiny medical syringe and plunged his leg. The man did not flinch. His blood was spilled across him like wine across coal in the light of her lantern. She watched him. He reached alongside himself for his weapon but she took up hers from the gravel in time and stuck his neck and leaned in as the man gave a cry and a kick. She loosened her grip and pulled away and stood.

He laughed and coughed and held his throat with his hands and spat. What was that? Botox?

Yes. She dropped her weapon onto the gravel again and kicked the man's gun away. She touched her watch and walked away down and out of the light some paces. She tapped her ear and attempted to contact her scout. She waited, static dust. After a minute she returned to the body and scanned what was there of it referencing some ulterior constitution behind her eyes and without any indication of her insight she would find what was sought in that image and relinquish the notion.

She spoke at him but he did nothing. She repeated herself. Kneeling again she put her finger to his neck and withdrew and snapped a short blade from her ankle and adjusted her grip. She worked to cradle the man's head in her lap and went to paring away his ear. His heart no longer beat and his body had borne no soul with which to object to her intervention. Stroke for stroke she pulled and gouged and after a while she drew from him in a tangle some short metallic tether, wet and red. She pinched it and with her blade decoupled it like a picked flower. She dipped it in a puddle and brought it close and cleaned away the debris and dipped it again and snapped it into a pocket across her breast. She tagged her watch still caught to the train and its light went out. From the dead man at the side of the track she made herself before the tunnel, past the platform, and up the stepwell into the street. She touched her ear.

Jule copy over? She positioned herself beside a pillar kneeling and watching. Her attention turned to the tower. It was quiet and its windows were dark. Jule do you copy over? The sound smacked and went out.

Jule copy?

I'm here Shane. Five by five.

Shane held herself and looked out. Twenty?

Found us a bogey. I'm on the highway northbound in pursuit. What's good?

Tenfour. Found us a trophy. Any news on the garrison over? She felt safer speaking to her colleague.

—four. Her voice broke. Pocketnuke. Couple kilos. Army's gone. Airforce comin in. Shane nodded her head and listened. For now though the cats are away.

Okay let's play it then. Shane kept her voice low and her eyes along the pike. Yeah come find me man. This guy is going somewhere. The transmission popped and a siren rang out of the night behind her.

Shane could hear the dim approach of voices. Listen. I have a good feeling number three is going to come back to the station here. And I have an even better feeling he might have left something behind at the lounge so—she considered herself—I'll catch up to you when you get where you're going yeah? Some men stepped from behind a wall and held their weapons with intent though Shane was gone without a sound to spare. They looked at eachother in surprise.

Tenfour over out.

She made her way to the tower like an apparition making no sound and casting no shadow and when she came around to its rear she found her metal rope and looked up. Her leather trenchcoat still waved at the open window. Up the cable on the side of the tower glass she crept and she sweat as she pulled herself toward the windowlight. The black flag cast itself in the wind like a bucket of pitch. She worked herself up and soon she stopped and listened. Straining and cocking her ear she waited. Something gave her a turn in her chest and she held fast to keep it inside before she dropped the cable and fell to the ground and rolled and stood and ran. Around the brick and stone walls she came in a whip and further yet past the apron at the gated margins through to a narrow aisle still within eyeshot of the wide window. She spun and looked on like prey in the grass. An enormous figure came into the aperture and blocked the light of the hallway behind it. She scanned the silhouette. It was in the shape of a man and it filled the window and the circuit inside her blinked and gave the man a name.

Frang. She took him in ablaze. She thought about the nature of a chase.

From where she hid she guessed at his size. The man took her coat in his hands from the catch at the window and pulled it out of view. She grimaced to herself at the absurdity of his scale. She watched him until she felt positively that he was watching back before she vanished into the backdrop of the cold and ragged rain, a wind in her trail.

MANTHLPIECE

by Anonymous

CHAPTER 2





O gravy! O gravy! Your comfort much exceeds the lady's! Your pale embrace and hot insides, your freckles—meaty sausage stys. How spring has sprung on me! Howmy appetite has been so freed! How Winter lumped and soured your taste, how it sizzled your sauce like water on the hot grill inside of me! So beholden am I to the lulls, the disease fall brings, the tarnishment of the image, the caging of the beast. Never truly can I lose the hunger—the patine, the gloss—it merely hibernates, always ready to jump, to leap, to pang my stomach with platonic hunger. Drizzle your creamand smother it on the finest of dreams, the palest of women, and not as soon as I've sucked every curd, slurped every drop, played every fore, will I look upon her breasts and ask: "More gravy please?". Nothing invades my mind quite so—be it birthed ontobiscuits, marinated on mammalian meats, or drank raw like a cracked egg, globbed andgulped down with animal instincts and desire—any of these forms, these colors, these contours, warm austeres of presentation, any platings, be it fine china or soggy paper, be it served by witches or by the most handsome of young men, nothing can satiate me but a meal, you, the sauce spilled over "food". Ha! No I say—veal, ground chuck, chicken, roast duck, these are toppings, these are the sauce, the cherry on top or underneath, enraptured in your cream—you and you alone are the object of the best of dreams.

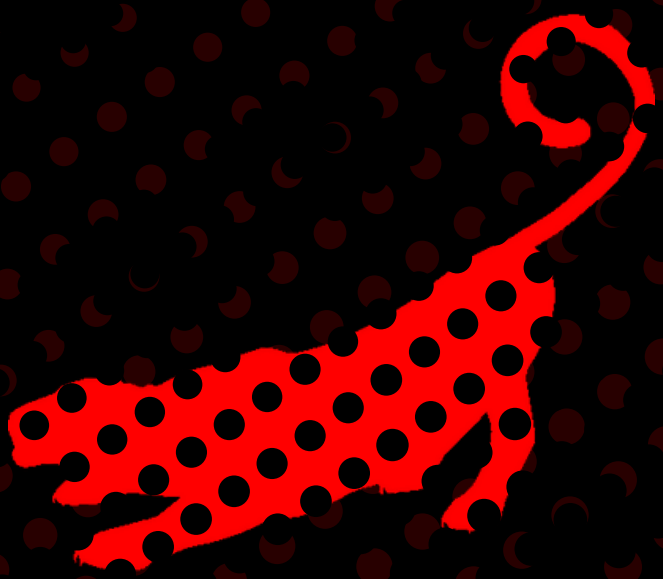
Hark! Where is my order? Who has my plate? I've sensed the spring and jumped and bring myself upon this place. Listen! How long must I wait? I demand to have what I desire at the speediest of rates! Heed now! My animal desire onto you might just explode, so please just bring my white sea so I can drink its gobby load. Silence! Hear that sound? Smell that smell? The pigs now burn! Their fats now run! A sacrificial hell! Soon the roux will soften, soon desire will run, soon the soothing savor of your sauce will bathe my guts.

Bravo! Compliments! Kiss the chef my friend! Wank him off for all he's worth 'cause this dish never ends! Plunge, do I, into the bowl, the bowels, the whole dish 'cause this dish never ends! Plunge, do I, into the bowl, the bowels, the whole dish growls and hisses. What weather! What food! What hunger have I have brewed! As flowers pollinate again so do my insides fill with food!

I'm bursting! I'm busting! My trousers have gone missing, my belt to dust and mist has kissed me goodbye, this food has filled me to the brim I think that I may die! Yes, the end, I see it now, and how lovely have I chosen, a time so rich with broth and blood, a raining of consumption. How calmly will this coma lie inside the early days of march, when I awake, o how I pray, I miss what I will fart.

Lamp Magazine presents

PANTHER PRIDE



A NOVEL

ZACK SMITH

CHAPTER ONE



Three days. The heatwave had gone on for three days. And this building was not built for Florida. The white cinderblock walls of the hallways were dripping with condensation, the air was thick with the scent of preteen sweat. Just walking across the building was a mind-wrenching chore. The school was basically just one long corridor, with three halls branching off of one side and a cafeteria and gymnasium bulging out from the other. Principal Heathrow was not sure if it was the air or his eyes that were boiling, as he groped and stumbled from his office down towards the atrium, but his destination was distorted by rolling waves of shimmering air. Rows of dehydrated, gasping stragglers bobbed along the hallway in front of him. The gaping black maw of the gymnasium grew no closer, no matter how many footsteps he took.

Heathrow, Principal Leeroy Heathrow, found himself suddenly in the atrium of Jefferson Davis Middle School, watching as the students filed past him into the gymnasium. It was nearly time for the pep rally. His mind was racing. He had never realized how many kids they had at his school, or what it was like to be smashed up in a tunnel with a thousand sweating bodies. The air conditioner was broken. No! Not broken, just malfunctioning. And it was—

This was, this was—

He couldn't put a name on it. There was no feeling, no comprehension in the students. They weren't even angry. The heat had reduced them to shells of people, devoid of any emotion or care. Heathrow himself could hardly breathe. There was no air inside the central corridor, just an invisible fog of thick humidity. Droplets of sweat tickled their way down his spine. He had already taken off his tie, so now he pulled his shirt loose and allowed his gut to droop freely. The kids did not seem to notice.

It was dead air. Slack tide. It was like wading in a river of mud, each step drawing you deeper and deeper into the muck. His head was spinning.

He leaned against the cinderblock wall and tried to catch his breath. He couldn't take it. Not for a moment longer. He pushed his way through the stream of unresisting children. He could spot no other adults towering over the crowd. These kids were not in need of supervision, anyway, and so he pushed his way across the atrium, mumbling 'excuse me' and 'sorry' as he bumped into the listless crowd. The double-doors had been propped open, just like every window in the building. He staggered out into the dazzling sunshine of the glittering asphalt. There had been a rainburst just an hour ago, and the air was steaming. But still he pushed forward, across the seething steam of the parking lot, until he could see the bank sign across the highway. His glasses were smudged. His face was running with sweat. He took his glasses off and tried to clean the lenses with the untucked front of his dress shirt. It was useless. But if he squinted, really squinted, he could just make out the red digits wiggling in the rising heatwaves.

One hundred and seventeen degrees fahrenheit.

The numbers blinked again, revealing the time. Only forty minutes left before the kids would begin filing onto the buses and Heathrow could call the technician and get the air conditioner going again. The district superintendent wouldn't even need to find out. They'd get the test done in summer and the budget and they'd get a whole new ventilation system rigged up. But now he needed to go back inside. The parking lot was nearly empty. Only six teachers had stayed back to supervise the pep rally.

It was too hot for May. It shouldn't be this hot. He peered at the sky. Was it going to rain again? If the humidity rose anymore, they would be dropping like flies.

The crowd had thinned out by the time he got back inside. The school resource officer, Darin Pond, was standing over the students, watching as the last few stragglers finished up at the water fountain. Tugging at his collar, shaking his head, blinking incessantly as the perspiration trickled down from his balding crown and dripped over his brow. Heathrow caught his eye and waved him over. He was breathing heavily, staring over Heathrow's shoulder.

"These kids need to get outside," said Pond. "You need to get everyone out of this building, now."

Heathrow wheezed and jerked a thumb back at the open door.

"You been outside lately?"

Pond glanced at the door. He seemed to visibly recoil at the sight of the rising steam. Heathrow sighed.

"I called the bus drivers already. Shit takes time, man. What do you want me to do? Turn them loose in the sun?"

Pond shook his head.

"I don't fucking know man, this is—"

Heathrow turned away, towards the students. Pond was getting ready to do it again. They did not have time for this. Not when they only had forty minutes left before the kids were no longer their liability. He was already sputtering, like he was choking on his words. Conspiracy theories about foreign exchange kids.

"Mike had no fucking business in the locker room. He opened that vent!"

So what if he did, thought Heathrow.

"I can't tell you how to do your damned job. You know where the intercom is. If you got probable cause, you can call him up."

"You gonna back me up, if it goes to court?"

Heathrow shook his head. Pond had never gone three sentences without dropping some snide little sarcastic remark. Heathrow could understand his sudden lack of wit. But right now he did not have the patience for even the shortest of arguments.

"I didn't see anything different than you did."

The last of the kids were inside the gymnasium. The lights were on but it seemed terribly, deeply dark compared to the atrium. Of course it did, Heathrow was standing right beneath the skylight, and the sun was throwing down a dazzling shaft of light down from almost directly overhead. It shined down on the mural painted on the white tile of the floor. A Jefferson Davis Middle School Panther. Not just their mascot, also the Florida state predator. Mouth open, teeth bared, claws extended. Right now it was sickening to look at, shining in the neon glow of the afternoon sun.

Heathrow gave Pond one last shrug and turned to the gym. Within ten feet he was overwhelmed by the heat. There was no noise coming from inside. The students were not chattering. They were leaning back and shoving one another in a desperate fight for space. The heat came piping out through the open doors like a blast furnace. Heathrow staggered back and turned to Pond.

"Go get the nurse. Anyone you can grab. If we get any heat casualties, they'll go to the cafeteria."

Heathrow watched as Pond shuffled down the central corridor, his shoulders sagging in the heat. The nurse's office was just past the nearest hall, the eighth grade hallway. Across from that was the cafeteria. Heathrow looked once more at the suffocating darkness of the gym, and then decided to take the back way, in through the boy's locker room.

Chris Hobbs did not notice when Principal Heathrow clicked the side door open and stumbled into the locker room. He was in the showers, along with all the other guys from the football team, and he could hear nothing over the pattering of the lukewarm water streaming down over his head and dripping onto the floor. They were fully dressed, no heatwave could ever justify any gay shit, but they were holding their heads under the showerheads, heedless to the water soaking their shirts. It made no difference now, not after three hours of broken air conditioning. His jersey was already soaked through, but it had also been a long time since there had been any cold water in the taps.

None to drink, none to splash on their faces. Heathrow had given an announcement earlier, giving open passes to any kid who wanted to drink water. Chris had been in Coach Campbell's pre-algebra class. Coach Campbell didn't care what Heathrow said. Rules were rules, and you needed his signature if you wanted to leave his class.

Thirty of us, one of you, Chris had thought. Too bad the other students were all pussies. A lot of things would have been different if the other students were as tough as Chris. There wouldn't be any bullshit FCAT, any bullshit homework, bullshit pep rallies

If Chris hadn't been on the football team, if he hadn't been assigned a starring role in the pep rally, he wouldn't have even stayed this long. He would have walked right out the atrium door when the announcement came and went to the grocery store or the bank or someplace with air conditioning. Might have kept walking forever. Right over the school lawn and across the highway and into the seething heat of the pine forest behind the bank.

He was jolted from his daydreams by Heathrow's pathetic cough. Chris was the last one to shut off his tap and shake the last few drops of water from his black hair. He wandered over to the opening of the showers and sloshed through the puddle of water which the other kids had dripped onto the ground. Heathrow stood in the center of the loose circle, nodding at the ground.



Chris waited for him to say something about the showers or the water on the ground. The teachers at this school could always find something to complain about. There was always some new rule they could come up with to make things harder for everyone. And that was all Chris needed, after three hours of this heat. Just one more little push. The tiniest excuse and he would go storming out of the building. The teachers couldn't touch a student, he only had to worry about his parents, and Chris knew perfectly well that his dad wouldn't have even put up with this much.

But Heathrow did not complain. He only nodded sagely at the puddle of tepid water beneath his feet, and then looked over at the showers. Finally, he took off his glasses and rubbed his forehead and then looked up.

"You guys staying cool, in here?" he asked, reaching out to steady himself on a row of lockers. No one answered. Chris had never seen such a sweaty man in all his life. Heathrow nodded again, his stupid fat cheeks jiggling. The principal's cheeks seemed to be sagging twice as low, today. Without his glasses to magnify them, his eyes appeared shriveled and beady. He was staring at them, but he was blinking so much that Chris thought it impossible that he could actually see anything.

"Alright," said Heathrow. "It's not a great day for this. I won't lie. But a schedule's a schedule, alright?"

Chris wasn't going to give him a single word. Wasn't even going to give him a nod. Heathrow didn't seem to notice.

"But you're the Jefferson Davis Panthers. I don't think I need to tell you what that means. You've taken us to state four times in the last six years—"

Chris snorted as Heathrow continued to drone on. Ancient history, old man. Nobody in this room had even been at this school for the entire last six years. Sure as shit hadn't gone to state when Chris Hobbs had been there, and not for lack of effort so much as the Coach's lack of common sense.

"—and that's the attitude that's gonna get us through this pep rally. And that's the attitude that's gonna inspire the rest of the school to stick with it and focus and knock that damn—sorry, darn FCAT out of the park!"

Heathrow gave a short clap.

"Now let's show them what we got!"

Someone spoke up from the corner. Tyler Davis, star quarterback of the eighth grade. An enormous piggish boy, incredibly stupid, the only person too stupid to tell that Chris wasn't as good at football as everyone else thought he was. Just now he was staring at Heathrow, slack-jawed and gaping, as usual.

"Is it time for us, already?"

Heathrow blinked and shook his head. The thumping of the band's drumline was still pounding, out in the gym. They still had a song to finish.

"Let's wait," he said.

Donny Jenkins hated the tuba. He loved ska music, and he wanted to play the trumpet. But the band teacher had told him that there were no openings for the trumpet at the beginning of the year, and besides, Donny was the only one with strong enough lungs to handle the tuba. Donny knew that wasn't true. He had ashthma for fuck's sake. The tuba damn near killed him everytime he picked it up. No, he knew that he had been forced to play the tuba because he had the Tuba Look. He was big-boned, he had red hair and freckles, and a fleshy, pig-like face.

The fact that the band teacher had made him band captain as a compromise was even more insulting. Not only did he have to play the dumbest instrument, but he had to stand in front of the rest of the band, drawing even more unwanted attention to himself. For days after a football game, the players would follow behind him in the hallways and imitate the 'womp-womp' sound of the tuba every time Donny Jenkins took a step.

As he led the band into the jam-packed gymnasium, huffing and puffing into the mouthpiece of his ridiculous instrument, he took a moment to thank god that they hadn't been made to wear their band uniforms. Even in a t-shirt and shorts, the atmosphere was unbearable. The dense smog of body heat smothering the entire school seemed to dampen the music, and he could not imagine that the notes which gurgled forth from the bell of his tuba could even reach the upper seats of the bleachers. The band members were terribly out of time and tune with one another. Some of them weren't even playing.

Through the harsh, discordant screech of brass instruments and the weak, bumbling rumble of the drums, Donny could just barely make out the underlying melody of the song they were supposed to be playing: *Hey Ya* by Outkast.

Ordinarily, Donny would be incredibly self-conscious at a moment like this. The entire student body was here, crammed side to side in the bleachers, standing in the wings, and even lining the floor of the basketball court, sitting cross legged and spilling over the sidelines, constricting the open area on the court to a third of its designated space. But none of the students seemed to be taking any pleasure from his humiliation. In fact, on the few panting faces that paid him any attention, he could only see pity.

The plan was for the band to enter from the side door of the gym, make one full circuit of the gym, and then come to a standstill, flanking the edges of the court. Then the football team would do their skit, and then Heathrow would come out and give a speech. It all seemed simple enough, but Donny could feel that it wasn't going to work.

They'd already made it three quarters of the length of the court, but now, with just fifteen paces to go, Donny was having trouble seeing. The sweat was in his eyes, but he couldn't take his hands off the tuba to wipe his brow. His legs were shaking, and it was a massive effort to lift his foot even a few inches from the ground. And his lungs. His lungs were on fire. He needed air.

Fuck it, he thought, and sucked in a deep breath.

But he couldn't.

There were specks of light dancing around the edges of his vision. He felt the kid behind him bump up against him. He was dizzy and nauseous. He wanted to cry out for help, but he could not summon the breath. His vision grew dimmer and dimmer, and then it happened. Donny Jenkins fell flat on his face, gasping like a fish out of water.



Carson Whicher watched it happen, but he wasn't sure what it meant. It wasn't until Officer Pond had pushed his way through the crowd and then dragged the fat kid away that it suddenly clicked: the silence. A big fat kid with a tuba had just fallen flat on his face in front of the entire student body and nobody was laughing. Obviously the football team wasn't here but even still, someone should have picked up the slack. He looked around at his friends: Ryan Macdonald, Macie Mountbriar, and Ronald Simmons. Macie's friend, Britt, was there, and so was Ronald's old friend from elementary school, Mark Lylen.

Right now, Carson was staring straight ahead. Trying to support his head on his hands, becoming frustrated with the slickness of his palms. Everyone was sweaty. It was uniform day in Pre-ROTC. He didn't care. His stiff shirt was already untucked, his tie was in his back pocket. He did not have the energy to look around him. And why bother? He could feel their terrible, awful bodies, crammed in too close. On a normal day, with working air conditioning, this would be too close.

He did not need to look at them to hate them. Ryan Macdonald would be the one to make the joke. Sometimes he was funny, but he mostly just used quotes from Family Guy or South Park. Macie had a way of maintaining her elegance, even in the deepest heat, but she could also always find something to complain about, even in the lightest breeze. Robert, the fat nerd with his computers and that little greasy ginger asshole, Mark Lylen. That kid must have not showered even once this week.

It seemed impossible to believe that just three hours ago, they had all eaten lunch together. They had been friends, except Mark Lylen, all complaining in mutual misery about the school and the broken air conditioning. But friendship was not possible in this nightmare. Carson tried as hard as he could to remember what his dad always said when Carson was complaining about someone: and I wonder what they would say about you.

They were in the top row of the bleachers. Ronald had led them there, under some confused notion that it would be cooler. It was not cooler. If anything, it was the hottest Carson had been all day. The body heat was rising and forming into a thick cloud, right over their heads. Carson did not dare lean back, for fear of touching the cinderblock wall. All of the sweat and breath was trapped in the cramped gym, and was now condensing along the wall, dripping from the ceiling, running down the grooves of the cinderblock in thick rivulets. Just now he was transfixed with the sweat drops trickling down his brow, sliding along the broad crook of his nose, and dangling from the tip. Each little drop hovered briefly in front of his nostrils before the next once came rolling down to knock it away.

There was a water fountain just outside, in the atrium. Plenty of water, everywhere. Sinks in the bathroom, sodas in the vending machines, and gatorade for sale in the cafeteria. But it would take too much effort, thought Carson, to stand up and push his way through the crowd. If half of the kids in front of him were half as tired as he was right now, they would not spare the energy to let him pass through. He wouldn't make it halfway, right now. Never would he find the strength to stand in line, anyway.

Finally, he closed his eyes and leaned back, ignoring the moisture dampening his back as his ears began to buzz and his eyes began to tingle.

Heathrow had wandered over to the showers, and was now soaking his head, when the band stopped playing and Chris Hobbs pushed open the door of the locker room and led the team out onto the court. He had Travis Beacher holding his left, Tyler Davis holding his right. Chris was right of center, but it was impossible to tell if he was in the right spot. There were too many kids here. A bunch of sweaty fucking nerds holding their brass instruments and wooden drums. Why were the band idiots still on the court? Chris had to elbow left and right to get any personal space, any room to breathe at all. Travis and Tyler weren't doing any better. Whatever formation they'd rehearsed was forgotten as they began to sag over and gasp for breath. Coach Dufrenses called out from the center of the court.

"Whoo!" he called out to the crowd, making an elaborate show of fanning himself with his hand. Chris decided that Heathrow was no longer the sweatiest man he had ever seen. The coach's voice cracked slightly as he continued reciting his script.

"Is it hot in here, or is it just the Jefferson Davis Panthers over there?"

The script called for the crowd to laugh. No one did.

"Maybe it's both? Well, listen. We've only got twenty minutes left in here, and then it's off to the buses."

A student from the back row shouted out to him.

"Is the ac gonna be fixed tomorrow?"

That wasn't in the script. Coach Dufresnes looked down at the ground and gulped. "I don't know. You'll have to ask your principal about that. But I can tell you one thing: Principal Heathrow and your custodian have been working on it all day. If it's fixable, they're gonna fix it. Because tomorrow's the FCAT."

Several students booed. Chris Hobbs looked with longing towards the exit of the gym. He could see the cop and the nurse with a sheet of paper in hand, fanning off that fat kid who played the tuba. The tuba kid lay unconscious on the ground, completely oblivious to his surroundings. For the first time in his life, Chris envied one of the band dorks. Dufresnes was shouting again. "Hey, Travis?" he asked.

"Yeah, Coach?" replied Travis Beacher, in a dull monotone.

Coach Dufrenses did his best to look apologetic while shouting enthusiastically.

"What are you gonna do to the FCAT tomorrow?"

Travis did not look up.

"I'm gonna, I'm gonna- I'm gonna—"

Travis was babbling. Dufresnes tried to help him along.

"Are you gonna tackle it?"

Travis Beacher was still looking down at the ground, swaying from side to side, seemingly entranced with the puddle of sweat dripping from his face. He looked up at Coach Dufresnes without speaking, just swaying back and forth. Chris wanted to ask if it was heatstroke, but if the coach didn't see anything wrong, then Chris didn't see any reason to speak up. But now Tyler Davis was talking in that confused drawl of his.



"Coach?"

It took a long time for Dufresnes to look over at him.
Tyler swallowed.

"Ain't that what you was talking about yesterday, at practice? Heat stroke?" Coach Dufresnes looked back at Travis. Chris forgot about the pep rally, focusing instead on Travis's face. Ordinarily, Travis was always a sort of pale color, in direct contrast to his thick black hair. But now the coach slowly reached over and lifted Travis's chin with his fingertips. Even Chris could see that his skin had gone bright red. His pupils were dilated. He seemed to have lost control of his lower jaw. The coach glanced nervously over his shoulder, but the nurse and the cop and the fat kid were gone. He gently placed his hands on Travis's shoulders and turned him around and then gave him a light nudge in the direction of the locker room. "Why don't you hit the bench? Drink some water and rest up for that FCAT!" As Travis staggered off towards the locker room door, Coach Dufrenses turned to look at Chris.

Chris met his gaze, flat and level. Dufresnes seemed to be pleading with him, before he turned back to the other kids.

"I bet Chris Hobbs knows how to handle the FCAT!"

Fuck the FCAT, mouthed Chris, under his breath. Fuck the FCAT.

He took a long gulp and looked at the coach. And then another voice spoke up. A smooth voice, with just a trace of a hispanic accent. Mike Little, the Cuban kid, was strolling in through the gym door. He had just moved here last month. Pretty cool dude, as far as Chris was concerned. Even now, his voice cut through the heat and the crowded whimpering coming from the bleachers, seeming to bring a tropical breeze along with it.

"I know what's going on!"



Officer Pond had left the tuba kid with the nurse and had gone to take his position back at the gym door. He got there just in time to see Mike Little come sneaking out of the side hallway and then dart in through the crowd. Coach Dufrenses made no effort to stop the kid, as Mike strolled into the middle of the gym and began to wave his arms, seizing the attention of every kid in the room. Pond could hardly believe what he was seeing. Nobody seemed to question Mike, ever. Was that all it took to win the admiration of everyone in the school? A popped collar and a permanent smile? Pond could point out a dozen peculiarities about the kid. From the moment they first met, everything was wrong. Heathrow had called Pond into his office for a special meeting, to make sure the foreign kid felt at home.

"9/11, and all that," said Heathrow, with a solemn nod.

"Never forget," said Pond. "But what does that have to do with Cuba?"

"Never forget," said Pond. "But what does that have to do with Cuba?" Heathrow shrugged. Pond hated standing in the man's office. The walls hadn't been repapered since before smoking was banned in government offices, and the entire room still had a sickly yellow glow, as if the doorway was a portal back to the sepia tone days of the nineteen-seventies. Every spare inch of the room was filled with filing cabinets, and Heathrow's desk was piled high with old invoices and work orders, not to mention the little knick-knacks and trophies that he had been given over the years.

"Iraq? Cuba? Kids can't tell the difference. But I'm not gonna let anyone go around saying Jefferson Davis Middle School needs to spend a bunch of money on new signs just because some people look a little..."

He side-eyed the brown kid sitting in the chair next to him, his hands clasped and resting peacefully in his lap. Just sitting there, right at home, as if he wasn't the scariest looking fucker to ever walk the face of the planet. Those glittering canines, that thick scar crossing his brow, that other thick scar jutting up from his collar-bone, and the laugh. That rapid-fire woodpecker laugh. That was the first time Pond heard the laugh, right before Mike first showed his tendency to interrupt the adults in the room.

"Different!" offered Mike. Heathrow laughed.

"Right," he said. "Different. But yeah, you know, if you hear anyone saying he's up to something suspicious, just brush it off."

Pond shook his head. Suspicious? If this kid had floated over on a raft from Cuba, then where did he get those fancy pre-ripped jeans he was wearing? And Pond didn't have much time to look at fashion magazines, but he knew them Hollister polo shirts weren't cheap, either. And the scent. Mike Little hadn't drenched himself in that sickly-sweet bodyspray those other kids were wearing. He smelled nice. Subtle. Like rubbing alcohol, pine, and menthol. But forget the clothes: Mike's face looked like it had gone through a weedwhacker. Pond looked back over at Heathrow.

"I won't ignore anything."

He looked back at Mike.

"And I'd like to know how you got those scars."

Mike cocked his head.

"Do you have a warrant?"

Another laugh. Pond sneered. Mike Little wasn't the first kid to try and play the Bill of Rights card against school faculty.

"You got a lawyer?"

Mike was too eager to start nodding.

"He's trying to get my information transferred from my old school. Our countries are not friends."

Pond grunted, and Mike stopped smiling.

"I am sorry to joke about making your job harder. I am not used to these, how do you say, 'civil rights?' I only have a month's worth of history in your nation, but I can give you the orphanage where I was staying."



Pond wanted to kick himself. He liked being a police officer, but he had to admit that twenty years on the force had trained him to always look for the worst in everyone. That was why he had taken this job at the school, even though he was technically a year past retirement.

He had hoped to learn how to like people again, before he went back to the real world. And right now he was hassling an orphan, a guest in his country, a stranger all alone in a foreign land. Hassling him because he was wearing something nicer than tattered rags. Pond forced himself to think up something neutral to talk about.

"Where are you staying now? Is America treating you alright?"

Mike smiled.

"Old relatives. Cousins of cousins. They fled during the revolution. Very nice people." After a bit more chit-chat, Heathrow said it was time for Mike to meet his first teacher. Mike stood up and offered a warm handshake. Pond's hand had cracked in Mike's grip and ached for days afterwards.

And now, here he was, stepping up into the pep rally without resistance. Coach Dufresnes apparently didn't think adults should be in charge anymore. Pond wandered over to the door and watched as Mike looked at the crowd. Laughing, as he looked around at his fellow students, all of whom seemed to be suffocating on their own stench.

"It's too damn hot!," said Mike. "That's why I left Cuba! To get away from all this!" That last little comment actually managed to drag a few small laughs out of the crowd. But Pond still tried to catch the coach's eye and try and see if maybe he wasn't interested in restoring a little order to the students. If the floor of the gym hadn't been so crowded, he would have pushed right through and grabbed the coach by his collar and slapped him across the face. Pond wanted to ask him, or anyone: is this what we do now? We let the kids run the school? We just let the students shout profanity in the middle of the gym now? Is it okay to throw away the rules, so long as it gets a laugh from everyone?

"You can't take a test like this! I said that to my teachers! I said that, and you know what they said back?"

Coach Dufresnes was laughing along with him. And now Pond wanted to slap himself. Even the strictest cop would have to admit, if you were going to be suffering, you might as well laugh about it. But still—"

"They said: release the hounds!"

Mike was smiling, but that didn't sound funny.

"You can see on my face, what it was like, back in Cuba. Not like in America!" No laughter. Coach Dufrenses had cocked his head, was inspecting the scars on Mike's face as if it were the first time he was seeing them.

"In America you get air conditioning and freedom and rights! If you don't want to take a test, you don't have to take a test!"

That didn't sound quite right, thought Pond. It was time to put a stop to this. And where the fuck was Heathrow? Who the fuck was running this goddamned school? Pond did his best to shout.

"Mike! You need to find a seat and let the Coach run this show!"

Mike smiled and nodded.

"Just one more thing!"

The audacity of this little shit!

"The FCAT ain't afraid of death! The FCAT ain't afraid of heat! And if you want to beat the FCAT, if you want to really beat the FCAT, once and for all, then you can't be afraid either!" Pond started clapping. He hoped a round of applause would signal to Mike that it was time to do as he was told, but goddamn it, now Coach Dufresnes was joining in with, as if he thought Pond thought Mike had really said something special. Tyler Davis and now a couple of the kids in the bleachers. And as the applause died out, Pond could hear engines rumbling in the distance. He recognized the distinctive growl of the buses as they began to file into the parking lot, but just to be sure, he stepped back, slipped out the atrium door, and looked over at the stoplight. Six bluebirds were idling in a cloud of shimmering exhaust, over at the intersection. Pond turned and stepped back to the door of the gym, peering into the darkness as he waited for the shock of the sunlight to fade from his eyes.

Mike was gone. Heathrow had taken the court.



Sweaty, dismally sweaty. The gym seemed dark, suddenly, as Heathrow stepped out of the locker room and into the center of the basketball court. All eyes were on him, but he could think of nothing to say. He had forgotten the script.

"FCAT's tomorrow."

He scanned the mass of panting, red-faced students lounging in the bleachers or sprawled out on the floor, crawling towards the door.

"Air conditioner's broken."

Mike Little was grinning at him from across the room. Double thumbs-up. Heathrow had heard the speech Mike had given. A speech about adversity and hardship. You would think that sort of thing would really cut the wind out of their sails, but it had gotten something of a reaction. The buses were rumbling outside. He could take a few more minutes. They could still end this day on a positive note.

"And it's hot and you're tired! Ready to go! You can hear those buses, right outside!"



The students were perking up.

"And you're about to get on 'em and go home and drink some ice water and rest up and come back tomorrow."

Someone, Tyler Davis, he recognized, was shouting behind him.

"We gonna have ac?"

Shrug.

"Maybe."

Heathrow forced himself to laugh.

"Maybe not. It doesn't matter. The FCAT is coming tomorrow whether it gets fixed or not. And that's life for you. The world doesn't stop just because we're having electrical issues. Alright? You think middle school is hard? You think taking the FCAT is hard? You'll be lucky if this is the hardest thing you ever do in your lives. Heck, the hardest thing you do before you graduate."

Pond was waving from the door, jerking his thumb back at the buses. Heathrow caught his eye and nodded, holding his palm up to indicate that he would only be one more minute. "So let's just give it one chant, before we go outdoors."

Heathrow scanned the crowd for Mike, knowing he would be the one to get the chant started. But he'd slipped off somewhere, and now the words were rolling out of Heathrow's mouth before he could even consider them.

"On the count of three: beat the FCAT!"

It took everything he had to give the count. One, two, and three. He could barely shout the actual chant.

"—FCAT!" he barked, into the dead, silent gymnasium.

He took a deep breath and looked over the crowd. Some were nodding off, but most of them were staring directly at them. If they had energy to stare, then they had energy to shout. "I'm forty-three years old and if I can get enough breath to muster up a little Panther Pride, then I think at least a few of you kids can, too."

It didn't look likely. But he could not back down now. Just one quick chant. If they gave him one solid one, he'd let them go. He would do more than that. He'd call the superintendent and tell him the FCAT was getting rescheduled, the AC was getting fixed, and the dress code could be loosened. He would do that, for them. Just one shout.

"Let's hear it, guys. One shout."

He gave them a second to catch their breaths.

"One! Two! Three!"

A few of the students groaned. A wave of impotent anger washed over Heathrow like the stormwall of some feckless hurricane. He sputtered and just barely restrained himself from stamping his foot. They couldn't give him this? Because the air conditioner was off, suddenly the rules didn't matter anymore?

Count to ten. Ten deep breaths. Just think it through.

Heathrow resorted to the one bit of leverage he had left.

"How about this? Nobody leaves this room until I hear a little Jefferson Davis Middle School Panther Pride! We're gonna show ourselves that we don't care about the heat, because we're tougher than that. We don't care about anything, anything at all, besides—"

He pronounced the next few words individually, with as much fury as he could muster, trying to drown the groaning and jeering of the crowd.

"Passing! The! FCAT!"

He paused for a moment to gauge the effect of his words. The groans had become louder and more numerous. Someone actually shouted at him to shut up.

"And you know what? We don't even care about passing. Passing doesn't mean anything. We care about beating the FCAT. Beating it so bad that it won't ever show it's face around here again! Huh? How about that? So we're gonna shout it out, loud and proud! On the count of three: Beat the FCAT!"

Heathrow planted his feet on the ground and struck his most imposing stance.

"One!"

The kids were starting to breath, now. Some of them were even standing up. "Two!"

He paused, looking around, trying to meet as many of the student's faces as possible. He was somewhat shaken by the expression of vacant anger they wore, but he did not falter. He bellowed the final count so loud that he was not sure that he would have breath left for the actual chant.

"Three!"

He paused to inhale, but before he could speak again there was a shout from somewhere in the bleachers.

"Fuck the FCAT!"

Heathrow looked as if he'd swallowed a fly.

"What'd you say?" he demanded of the crowd.

"Fuck the FCAT!" shouted a different student from directly behind him. Heathrow wheeled around to spot the latest shouter, but no sooner had he turned than a shoe came flying from across the gym and slammed into his back. And again came the shout. "Fuck the FCAT!"

"Yeah, fuck the FCAT!"

Heathrow was screaming at them to shut up, to no avail. All around him the students had erupted intoopen rebellion, screaming "Fuck the FCAT!" and "Fuck this school!" in unison. In an abstract way, Heathrow couldn't help but wonder where all this energy was coming from. A moment ago, they'd all looked like zombies. Now they were hurling paper and binders and backpacks across the gym and screaming profanity as if they were possessed. And now, some of them were jumping to their feet as the others fell open-mouthed on their sides, gasping for air.



This is crazy, thought Heathrow. If you want to leave, making a big mess you'll need to clean up isn't very smart.

Neither is throwing books at your principal, thought Heathrow, as a crowd of students rushing past knocked him to the floor and sent his glasses skidding across the linoleum. By the time he'd found them and struggled back to his feet, the gym was almost empty. But things had not gotten better. He heard the smashing of a panel of glass, followed by a shrill scream. He scrambled to his feet and out into the atrium.

He was greeted by a horrific sight: the glass cover of the bulletin board had been smashed away and he could see a bloody handprint smeared on the wall. And then, from his right, he saw two students wrenching the fire extinguisher from its case. All around him was the sound of students screaming and school property being destroyed. He could see students running amok all over the central corridor and teachers frantically fighting their way through the chaos.

"Hey! You two!" he called out to the two kids at the fire extinguisher. They did not even acknowledge his presence. He rushed to collar them and pull them away, but they ran off without even looking at him. Heathrow gazed at the storm raging around him and wondered to himself: where the hell is Pond?



Don't miss a beat! Keep your eyes on &amp Magazine for the next serialized chapter of Zack Smith's

PANTHER PRIDE


&
dup8



PORNOGRAPHY/HARMATIOLOGY

A young man. Pornography.

Smartphone screen. Porn website.
The search box, searching for the perfect sex scene.
Earphones plugged in, low volume.
Clicks. Many tabs opened.
Urges. Pornography.

“Si ♭ / Si ♭ / Do / Fa / Drum / Drum”
A perfect woman, flawless body.
Beautiful breasts. A well-trimmed pubian hair.
The vagina. Pink. Not moist as it should be.
Nevertheless, Lust.
Unreal. Pornography.

The man, tall and strong. Muscled.
A big penis he has. Unlike mine.
In fact, a black penis. His big hands on her sides.
My hands on my own penis.
She bites her lips staring at his penis.
Thight, Barely fit. “Oh Yeesss” the earphones say.
Moanings. Louder. Complimenting his penis.
Pleasure. Hard on. Stroking myself.
Masturbation. Pornography.

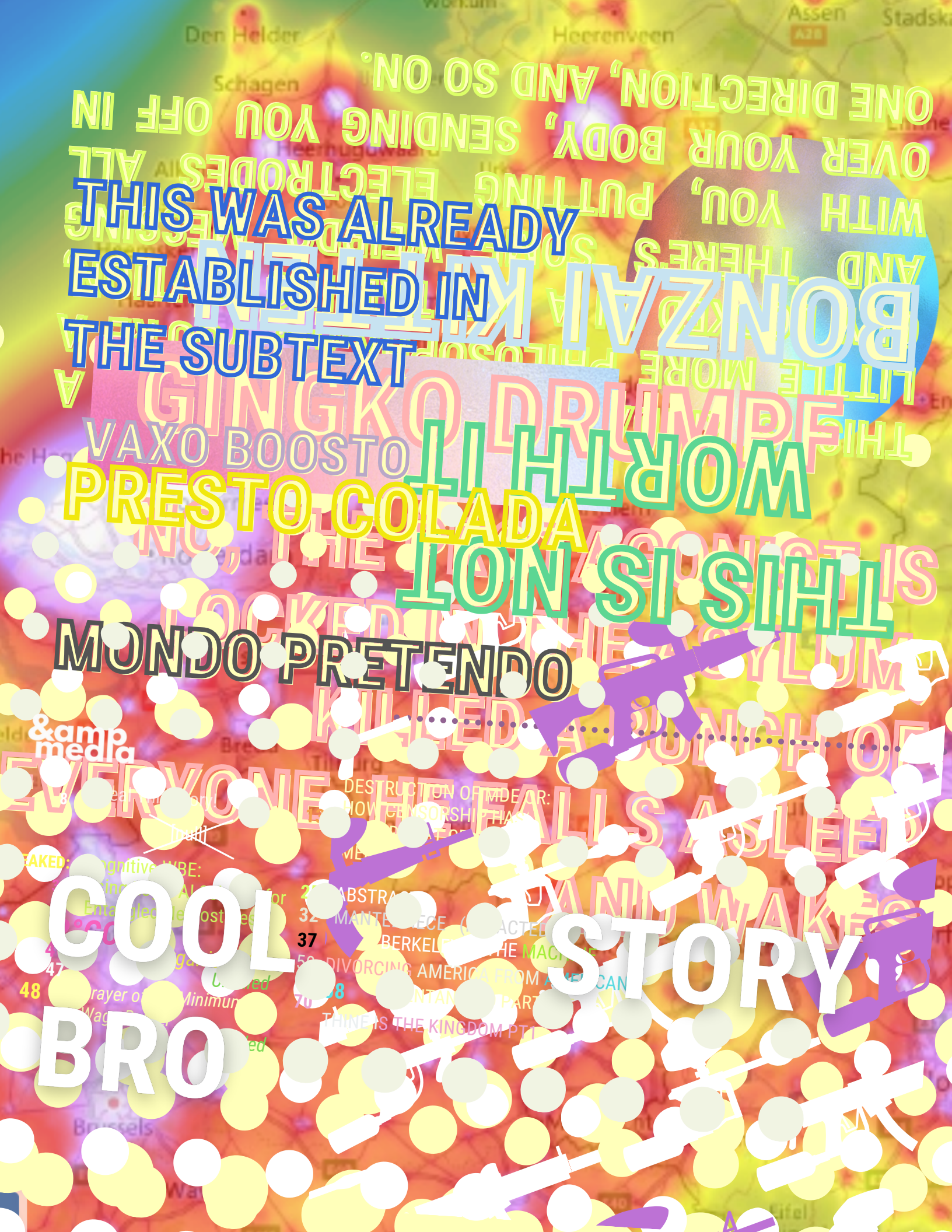
She moans. Loud on the earphones.
And I feel it’s almost there. Coming.
Pleasure. Urges. Must not stop.
Zero thoughts. Coming.
Eyes roll. Came.
Easy Reward. Pornography.

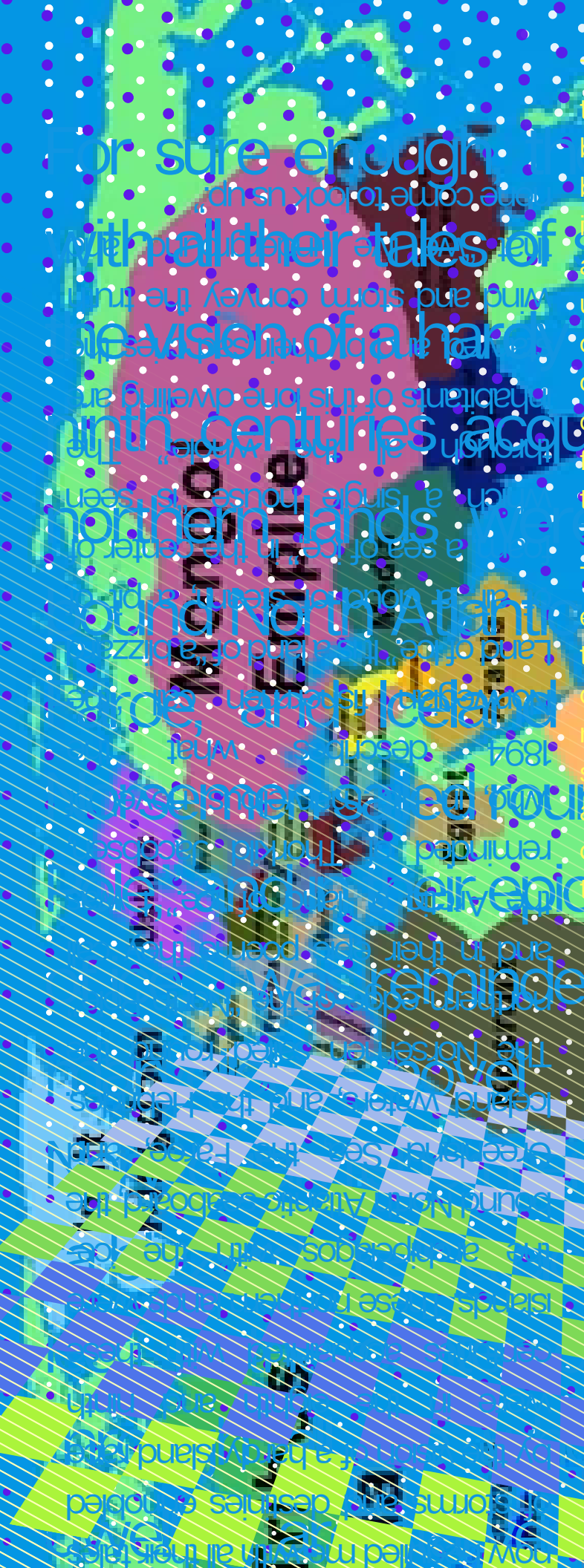
The semen in my belly. Shame.
Coming is over. Pleasure is over.
The scene goes on. Undisturbed.
Turn off the website. Disgust.
What have I done? Pornography.

Wiping the penis. Depression.
On my toes to the bathroom. Hot shower.
Depression.
Wash the penis.
Wash the body.
Wash my sins. Why cannot wash my sins?
A muffled sobbing. Regrets.
Salty tears roll by with the warm shower water.
Many whys.
Depression.
Turn off the shower, grab the towel and see myself.
In the mirror, there is shame.
Manhood taken. Pornography.

Back to bed. Smartphone left aside.
A prayer is said.
A prayer that seems empty.
A prayer asking for redemption.
A prayer asking for new life.
Silence. Hamartiology.

A young man. Pornography.


THIS WAS ALREADY
ESTABLISHED IN
THE SUBTEXT
PRESTO COLADA
WORTH IT
THIS SI SIHT NOT
MONDO PRETENDO
COOL
BRO
STORY



The author would like me to see his mood as tragic, but I see it as slightly comic. This is partly because of the kind of scene he describes, partly because of the singular technique he uses to bring it to life. The language is spare, and almost joyless; and yet it is not coldly technical. It has a certain understated eroticism about it, and there is a certain elemental beauty about it, which we may call "ruddy"—the colour of that substance which once glowed in our eyes like "the colour of light filtered through the wrinkles of the face," a colour of the inner life.

The scene in which the dog fights a bear is another example of this kind of scene. It is a low comedy—the bear is no real opponent for the dog, but a kind of master who projects his great strength from "a motionless body." The only object of the fight is to set the dog, which is dressed as a bear, in a rage—and the results very funny. The writer's description of the scene is refreshingly immediate. Here is the text:

Maurice was an essayist in those days; he wrote short pieces in columns, delivered the occasional lecture or speech in many languages, wrote sociological essays and a litany of light scientific memoranda. One didn't call him "an intellectual," or even "a very clever person." Yet there are real heroes in Maurice's life—Voltaire among them—not born aesthetes or fatuous instigators, but authors both "intellectual" and "plain." These two categories are as frequently and haphazardly confused in history as by everybody. A great deal can happen to make somebody more than another. Most of us never reach self-identification, especially the absence of such designation. But how ironic to finger on those sunny hours when not even his own life seemed remote enough for scorn, when not even faithlessness overwhelmed that spirit of transcendental friendliness to every man of virtue—because every one—which drew in all men everywhere.

Why does this strange image, seen in a man's eyes, come to mind? The stanza alluded to in the previous paragraph is about an accident at sea. The first words, though, were written in 1910, and they imply a dream of the future. The man looks back over his shoulder to the scene that gave birth to this strange image. The sea is calm; he is on his way to the wharf; his vessel is the calmest in the world. And yet the image is not calm; the clouds-speckled moon seems to move about in the sky. Is the man dreaming? Is he, perhaps, sailing in a boat—on a whaler, say—when a terrible storm breaks over the ship? Or was the vision inspired by the photo of the RMS Titanic which was published just before the ship sank? The lines also suggest the author's amazement that the image of the sunken ship has retained its fascination.

gutenberg.org/files/1260/1260-h/1260-h.htm

"Where the Northern Ocean, in vast whirls,
Boils round the naked, melancholy isles
Of farthest Thule; and the Atlantic surge
Pours in among the stormy Hebrides."

Nor could I pass unnoticed the suggestion of the bleak shores o
Greenland, with "the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone, and those forl
snow, where firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of w
the pole, and concentre the multiplied rigours of extreme cold." O
shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim t
words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the
standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boa
moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking.

I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quite solitary churchya
its low horizon, girdled by a broken wall, and its newly-risen cresce

The two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine

The fiend pinning down the thief's pack behind him, I passed ov

So was the black horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying

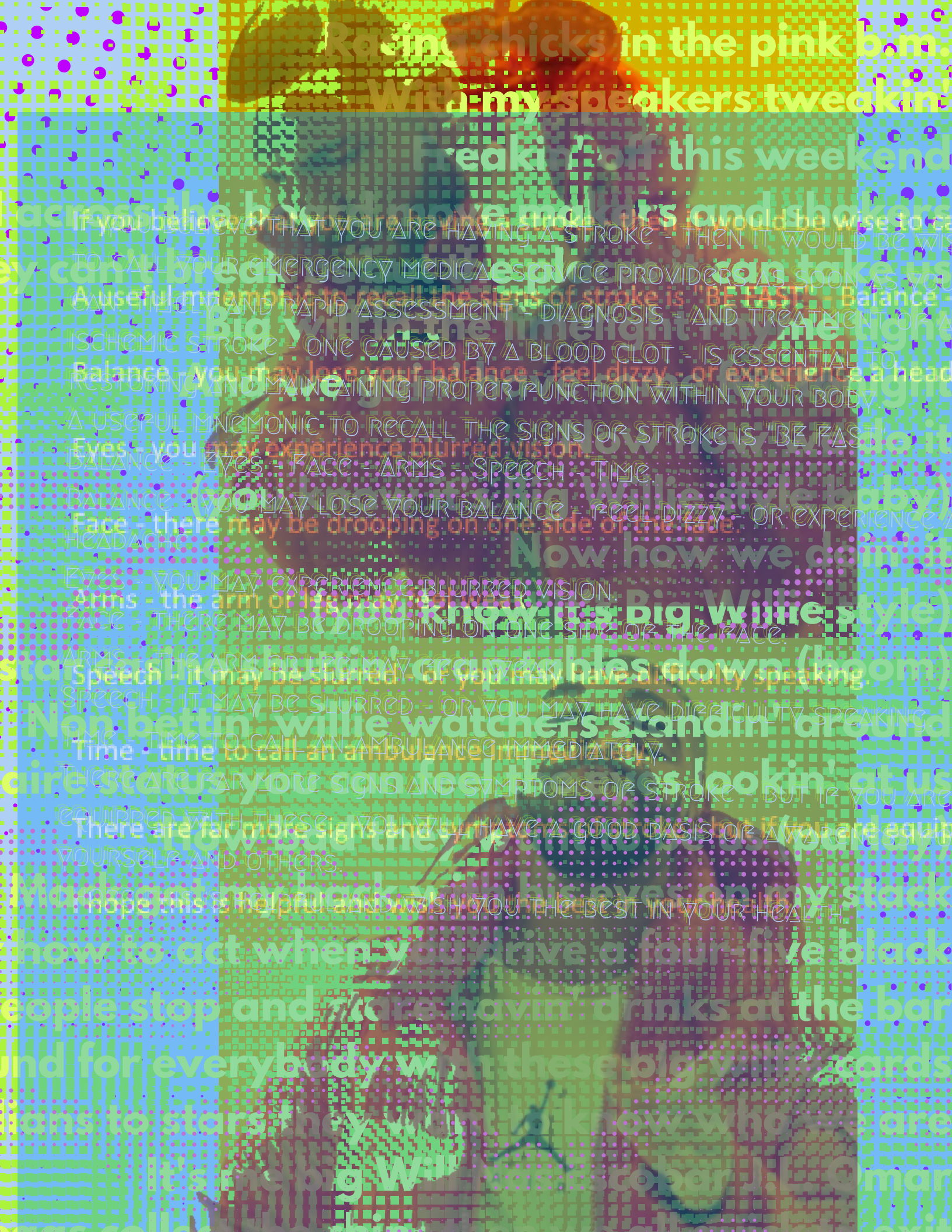
Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undevel
profoundly interesting: as interesting as the tales Bessie sometime
in good humour; and when, having brought her ironing-table to
while she got up Mrs. Reed's lace frills, and crimped her nightcap
and adventure taken from old fairy tales and other ballads; or
Pamela, and Henry, Earl of Moreland.

With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in m
too soon. The breakfast-room door opened.

"Boh! Madam Mope!" cried the voice of John Reed; then he pau

"Where the dickens is she!" he continued. "Lizzy! Georgy! (calli
out into the rain—bad animal!"

"It is well I drew the curtain," thought I; and I wished fervently
Reed have found it out himself: he was not quick either of vision


IF YOU BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE HAVING A STROKE - THEN IT WOULD BE WISE TO CA
TO CALL YOUR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDER AS SOON AS YOU
A USEFUL MNEMONIC TO RECALL THE SIGNS OF STROKE IS 'BE FAST'. - Balance
AND RAPID ASSESSMENT - DIAGNOSIS - AND TREATMENT OF A
ISCHEMIC STROKE - ONE CAUSED BY A BLOOD CLOT - IS ESSENTIAL TO
RESTORING AND MAINTAINING PROPER FUNCTION WITHIN YOUR BODY.
Balance - you may lose your balance - feel dizzy - or experience a head
A USEFUL MNEMONIC TO RECALL THE SIGNS OF STROKE IS 'BE FAST'.
Eyes - you may experience blurred vision.
BALANCE - EYES - FACE - ARMS - SPEECH - TIME.
BALANCE - YOU MAY LOSE YOUR BALANCE - FEEL DIZZY - OR EXPERIENCE A
Face - there may be drooping on one side of the face.
HEADACHE.
EYES - YOU MAY EXPERIENCE BLURRED VISION.
Arms - the arm or leg may be weak.
FACE - THERE MAY BE DROOPING ON ONE SIDE OF THE FACE.
ARMS - THE ARM OR LEG MAY BE WEAK.
Speech - it may be slurred - or you may have difficulty speaking.
SPEECH - IT MAY BE SLURRED - OR YOU MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY SPEAKING.
Time - time to call an ambulance immediately.
TIME - TIME TO CALL AN AMBULANCE IMMEDIATELY.
There are far more signs and symptoms of stroke - but if you are equip
EQUIPPED WITH THESE - YOU WILL HAVE A GOOD BASIS OF AWARENESS TO
YOURSELF AND OTHERS.
Hope this is helpful and I wish you the best in your health.



Anonymous 03/30/22(Wed)10:59:29 No.686540
deppression.png (210 KB, 400x400) google yandex iqdb wait



>>674596 (You)
Did not expect a wild houellebecq, here's a tegaki I made inspired by elementary particles


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Note on Ogden Nesmer's Eggplant (2021)

There is an allure to the private, closed-off island that is the scene of an unfolding of debaucheries–that of Le château de Cène, or Little Saint James–as there also is to the castle or monastery in the remotest mountains or desert, one's Silling. For Ogden Nesmer's Eggplant, it is a Micronesian atoll, "a single-celled organism," a vicious circle with its own time of excesses. Such spaces appear at once as states of exception from society's order and as secure retreats from the world's madness, in particular that of the rabble. (So, like the ascent of Etna, might one have tried plunging one's victim in Hunga Tonga, or at least identified with its trembling; by contrast, Covid cases on the Oceanian island nations are still only minimal.)

Eggplant follows Arda, a young L.A. contemporary-art-writer, who is sent, by an Errol Macke together with Arda's well-connected acquaintance Lin, to the atoll to conduct an interview with the elusive body-artist, or rather serial killer, Fevzi Goshen. To that end, she and Lin stay at the atoll's resort, the Moray, not as guests, subject to the same hospitality as their rich fellows, but, Lin stresses, as "administrators." A former artist commune, the atoll is now traversed by golf carts, where the elite, the people of power and intensity, come to indulge their license away from civilization on the beaches and in the disorienting halls, multicolored and gold, of the modern-architectured Moray (a moment of respite is offered by the adjacent Damselfish complex, local Weenie Hut Jr's). Ultimately, this is the truth, yet that truth is overlaid with its double–as various measures of security (spatial, mental) also constantly double and shift over the course of the novel. The Moray is itself a "safe space," the place of security needed to bring in-security to others; outside the resort's property, it is a legal no-man's-land. Yet, the resort is also described as a "camp," and its guests–a privileged, diverse, but "formless mess" or mass, a "herd"–are not all there willingly. Or rather, while, as we learn, the atoll was the former site of government experiments on human subjects, now it cannot even be a question of will or coercion, and some go to their deaths as a new ritual, a simple pleasure. Is this island-camp, then, the exception to, or the example, the paradigm of, our world?

It seems fitting that Goshen is not actually staying here but arrives from elsewhere, staying at the abandoned King Crab complex on the atoll, the sovereign ruins of his Lacoste (with a circular space within, like an operating theater). Here it is Goshen "works," consecrated to an absolute art, a terrifying art, sacred in its repulsion, an art that, like any artist would wish, must not be used, limited by discourse, communication, the progressive "pull" of history. Instead, the work communicates with the absolute other–Goshen speaks only to God–and that through, and at the expense of, others (autrui): outside morality, certainly outside today's moralisms that are still just distilled from some harm-principling humanism, the limit to appropriation art is no longer human life. In transcending the circle of worldly exchange, in negating life, the artist is not simply getting off, a lustful Turk; in the pull of death he finds a higher calling, following the material movement, the creation and destruction, of the universe (Sade's Nature). (Nor is Goshen himself excluded from this art of death, taking on in his own death throes the pose of a praying mantis, figure of a drive toward self-annihilation, lost to space in mimesis, devoured by his empusa.)

And yet… Is that how it is? is Goshen the ultimate sovereign, in control, all other powers but masks under which he lurks? or does the mask cast a headless shadow? or is it another force that directs things? Everett, the elite mastermind of the atoll, claims Goshen is his "prize possession," and that it is really his influence, his way of thinking, that exerts itself on Goshen, and on global culture and thought at large. That death might be the limit to the power over life: this too may be captured and repurposed, purposed. And Goshen still works, and his art, for all its gore, still ends up on canvas.

Here we do not practice objective criticism of books. We approve of ideas or we combat them. Eggplant is an ably written novel—the odd typo or solecism excepting (but then, look at The Superrationals, for example, worthy somehow of Semiotext(e), a publisher among whose covers Eggplant's wouldn't be out of place, incidentally)—a thriller with characters and their pasts concerned with the coursing along of its plot, but more importantly an art novel, among which we might count Fuck Seth Price (2015), more recent post-Young-Girl Künstlerromane such as Mercury Retrograde (2020), or my semi-abandoned novella desu. We have the restrictive trappings felt by Lil Dirty Boi, the post-Hennessy Youngman, post-Dana Schutz, post-The Hate U Give, capital-B black artist of the novel's opening; we have NFT art, which, Arda and Errol quickly agree upon, is not to their liking; and also that cumbersome old beast called painting, perhaps calling to mind bro-art gestural abstraction. (But can one still be a bro in art? without either taking the cryptobro route of art-burning NFT parties in Miami, or that of the more popular swag-art, to which Lil Dirty has perhaps also been condemned.) Yet in Eggplant's deliberate vocabulary there seems to be hidden something else: an aesthetic of the biosciences, of high tech and new materials housed in nature, vaguely recalling a post-Internet association (the sculpture of Timur Si-Qin or Ben Schumacher, say). This comes most to the fore on the small island, somewhere not too far from the atoll, where the deuteragonist Sam (who had his own episode of wild violence on the Y2k Internet, pre-post-, before it was domesticated by planning, parceled off to a "dark" underground) stays with the reclusive Baz and a certain stranger: among palmy foliage, the crates, tech, and aquaria filled with exotic marine life can easily function as an installation or décor on the white sand of this ocean-ringed land of plenty. But then this island is an even greater art space in another sense.

The mysterious island stranger (another mask?) holds a worldview not too dissimilar to Goshen's; the destructive movement of the universe, which is at once a vicious Life of pre-individual bodily intensities, is here expressed less by bloodsoaked sacrificial altars, however, than by a general inhumanism "slither[ing] […] in the muck." Can there be a desubjectifying substance, going beyond the human order, beyond its control virus of language, beyond Nature herself perhaps? The stranger finds the answer in fungi—which are not "created," but emanate from elsewhere. (Predating the animal and vegetal, so François Dominique writes of mushrooms in the recently translated Aseroë, "[t]hey don't belong to a defined kingdom"; on the contrary, their inexhaustible and absurd mutations themselves "modify the order of things and the system of naming them.") Irrelevant are the stranger's received ideas (he still speaks of purposiveness, efficiency, and a plan of "god"), and so too the art of the artists (Goshen) and the writing of the writer (Arda)—and perhaps they realize this, wishing to pass beyond who they are, what they've done, all earlier transgressions. A beautiful fungal virus, a vast more-than-rhizomatic spread, infecting the island, the atoll, consuming all: c'est de l'art.

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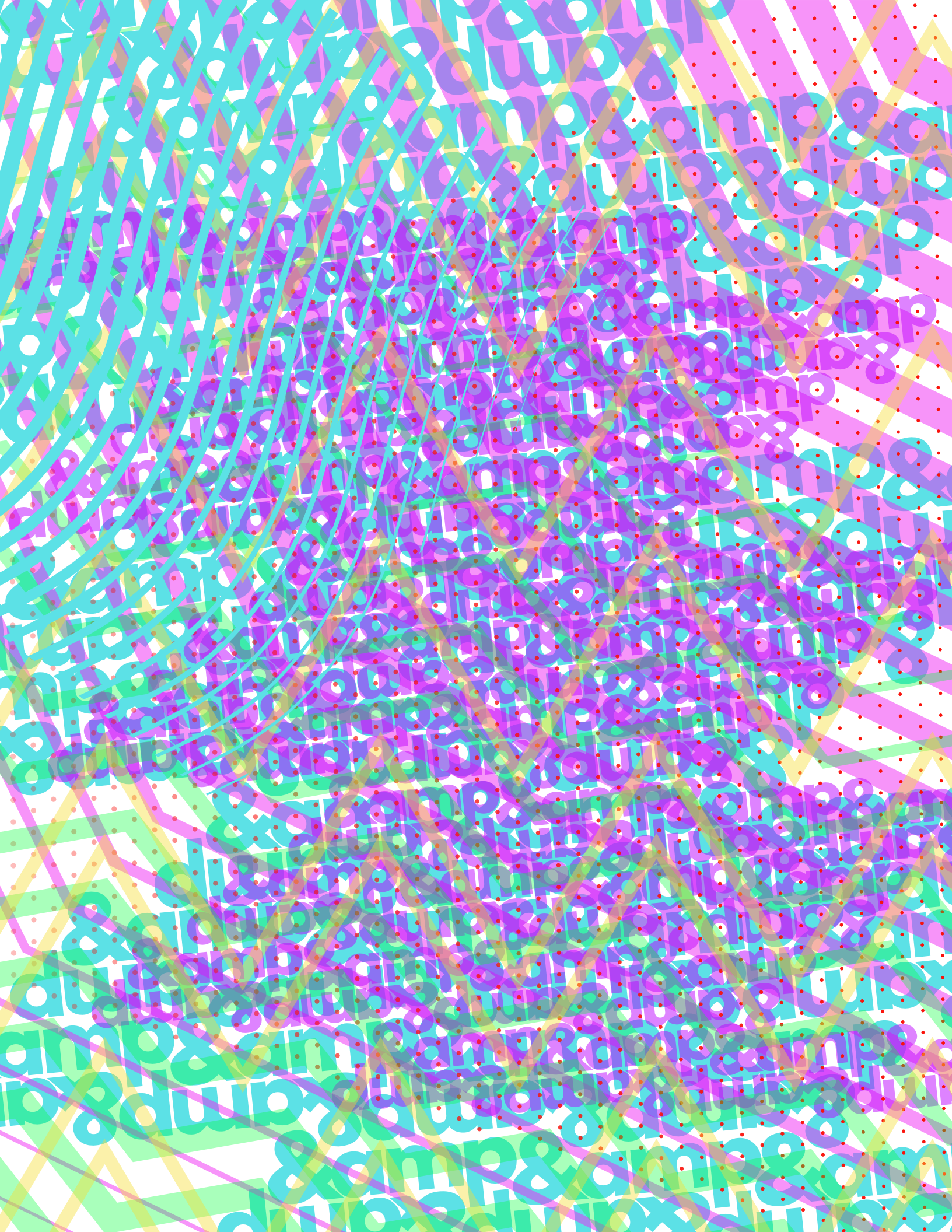
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